Being Gay, Being Straight:

An Anthropological Critique of Manchester's Gay Village

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PhD

2007

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of an area in Manchester known as the 'Gay Village'. It explores the history and changes in the meaning of this term for the people who live and work in the Village, as well as for those who visit it for leisure. The Village was originally created by gay activists who emphasised being gay as the basis for having a separate gay community. However, since being incorporated into Manchester City Council's culture-led regeneration strategy the area now attracts large numbers of heterosexual male and female users. For many heterosexual Village users being gay attaches as much to 'things' that they feel able to engage with in the making of themselves, as much as what it attaches to persons through the way they define their sexuality. Within the Village previous assumptions about the authenticity of the categories 'gay' and 'straight' have been subjected to much debate. The aim of the thesis is therefore to subject current understandings of contemporary gay and straight sexuality to critical analysis and to explore how ideas about sexual identity may be changing in Britain in the first decade of the 21st century.

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Acknowledgements

In contrast to the two anthropology departments in which I had been educated previously (Manchester and Cambridge), setting out to undertake an anthropological study in Britain was an unusual undertaking from the point of view of the Department of Anthropology at the LSE. Although this situation now appears to be changing slightly, the anthropology of Britain or, for that matter, Europe and North America, seemed for a long time not to be covered by the Department. Studying sexuality seemed even less common within a department in which the teaching of sexuality has not shifted from its traditional anthropological location within kinship, sex and gender relations. Henrietta Moore took the project on and for later supervising the project and for their warm encouragement I shall always feel indebted to Martha Mundy and Michael Scott. For their guidance with regards to the complex methodological and theoretical issues that this project has raised I would also like to thank Sophie Day and Jeffrey Weeks.

I shall always be grateful to my Master's supervisor, Marilyn Strathern. Without her belief in me all those years ago and her continued support over the years, I am not sure I would have been brave enough to begin this study, never mind see it through to the finish.

I would never have been able to complete this project without generous financial assistance from the London School of Economics. For keeping me going I would also like to give special thanks to my peers and friends. Particular thanks go to Annu Jalais, Clive Barry, Charo Scott, Kenneth Wong, Jonathan Yewdall, Michelle Obeid, Girish Daswani, Percy Santos, Elisabeth Engebretsen, Nicola Casarini, Eve Zucker, Agnes Hann and Moises Lino-e-Silva who were there for me when I needed them. And I would also like to thank my mum and Deborah and Ian, my auntie and uncle, for bearing with me.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all the men and women in Manchester who by agreeing to speak to me and let me hang out with them made the research possible.

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October 2007

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Introduction

This study is about a group of people frequenting an area in Manchester known as the Gay Village. It is an account of what happens when a community that has established itself as 'gay' starts to attract increasingly large numbers of men and women who self-identify their sexuality as 'straight' and the issues that this raises with regards to why they wish to use so-called 'gay space'. Based on twelve months' ethnographic research in Manchester, this study shows how once this area of the city starts to attracts straight users, understandings of what it means to be gay, to be straight and to have a Gay Village are subjected to deconstruction and debate.

Manchester's Gay Village grew out of the gay liberationist approach to sexuality which emphasised being gay as the basis for a collective group identity. A significant event in the creation of the Village as a separate gay space was a raid on a bar in the area called Napoleon's in December 1984, initiated by the homophobic Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police at the time, James Anderton. The raid created an alliance between the city's gay community, the City Council and gay businesses who attempted to promote a more gay friendly city. Allied to this was also the campaign to prevent the enactment of the notorious Section 28 which prohibited the promotion of gay sexuality by local

authorities as well as a real desire to attempt to achieve something in the struggle against HIV and AIDS. The Village became a centre for political activity and it became axiomatic that any organisation dedicated to the support of gay people would locate in the area.

However, since the early 1990s the Village has increasingly been incorporated into Manchester City Council's culture-led regeneration strategy. As such, it has been made central to the planned restructuring of the image of the city centre as a vibrant, exciting, cosmopolitan place in which to be. City Council policy towards the Village has thus increasingly taken the form of stimulating new business in the area. A number of newer Village bars have opened, some by national brewery owned chains, that do not exclusively regard themselves as targeting gay people. The filming and screening of two television dramas, 'Queer as Folk' (1999) and 'Bob and Rose' (2001), both set in Manchester and the Village, in particular, also brought the area to the attention of local, national and international audiences.

I argue that what the categories 'gay' and 'straight' now mean in the context of the Village space, has changed. In a city in which there is official encouragement of the concept of Diversity [with a capital 'D'], the Village has come to symbolise another side of life that offers the possibility of 'individual' self-creation. In this newly imagined perception of the area, gay sexuality is not only defined by how

people define their sexuality but has become bound up with images of 'things' imagined to be gay that men and women who self-identify their sexuality as straight also aspire to be associated with. The area has become attractive to straight users because in affording them a space in which to create themselves they are able to enlarge the limits of their own sexuality.

These changes in people's experiences and perceptions of the categories 'gay' and 'straight' coincide with the way that sexuality is being debated in the gender and sexuality literature, where the question of what constitutes sexuality and how we go about defining it has also been critically reassessed. Queer theory, the theoretical framework for these changes, has long been suggesting that a gay/straight binary is restricting and emphasises the multiplicity of ways that it is possible for people to choose how they wish to perform their sexuality (Rubin 1984, Sedgwick 1991). In the context of a world in which 'self' and 'other' have been subjected to increased commoditisation so that they feed off each other, it is also argued that there has been a shift in the way that many people experience and perceive their sexuality (Simpson 1996, Sinfield 1998, Hennessy 2000).

Outside of the discipline of social anthropology a number of scholars have noted that conceptions of how one forms one's sexuality have been undergoing steady transformation within the United Kingdom. Although their conclusions

are not based on in-depth ethnographic studies, scholars have pointed out that since the early 1990s a commodotisation of gay sexuality has been taking place within the United Kingdom and that straight women are choosing to engage with it by frequenting gay spaces (Mort 1995, Binnie and Skeggs 2004, Holt and Griffin 2003). Gay spaces it is argued are increasingly becoming sites in which different ways of being converge so that far from being fixed, the identities of these spaces have shifted as men and women who self-identify their sexuality as 'straight' increasingly move in and out of them. Frank Mort (1995) demonstrates how in the 1980s straight media professionals and entrepreneurs started to use gay venues in Soho and in doing so made the gay community itself more heterogeneous. According to Mort a diversity of identities began to feature in the nightclub and music venues in the area at the time. One club, for example, even started to promote itself as a 'stage for all mixed/gay straightbodies' (1995, p. 585) and deejays played 70s trash, funk and house music which brought together gay and straight people. According to Mort clubs in Soho attempted to promote what he terms the notion of 'sexual hybridity' (1995, p. 585) with flyers that targeted gay men and women and 'their friends'. Visual images inside some of the clubs also promoted the bringing together of gay and straight people. The aim was to create a truly mixed space in which men and women of all sexual constituencies felt comfortable which led many young straight men to playfully experiment with their identities. A number of shops also attempted to integrate gay and straight space. One club was decidedly straight until Saturday

night when the atmosphere changed. According to Mort a different mix of music, mainly light hearted soul and disco, encouraged an ambience which in the words of a London listings magazine was 'more camp than gay but not too camp to become unbearable' (1995, p. 587). Mort maintains that the concept of 'camp' as opposed to 'gay' signified a culture in which identities were temporarily blurred (1995, p. 587). Irony, mixed with a visual presentation which emphasised spectacle and performance, were strategies used to promote gay sexuality to a wider straight community. Mort argues that it was the 'rituals of consumption', backed by a highly specific material and symbolic geography which provided the infrastructure for these experiments in 'sexual hybridity' (1995, p. 587). According to Mort, in this way, young men who were both gay and straight opened up Soho to competing uses and representations of sexuality. Another study by Christine Holt and Griffin (2003) looks at the use of Birmingham's Gay Village by straight men and women. The study argues that both gay and straight users of the area perceive it to be a space where they can authentically 'be themselves'. According to this study young gay people experience a considerable degree of pressure to construct an identity and being authentic is particularly important when attempting to 'come out' (2003, p. 405). Claiming authenticity, according to Holt and Griffin, also serves as a basis for forging a collective identity and sense of belonging and for gay liberationist identity politics. It is argued that being gay is still a basis for difference from

being straight and suggests that for straight men and women the area represents a place in which they feel able to escape conventional heterosexual gender roles.

Within these studies, however, what it means to be gay and to be straight is still essentially defined by how people define their sexuality, a central element of which is sexual practice. Whereas what my own study emphasises is that through engagement with 'things' that they experience and perceive to be gay while they are using the Village space men and women who self-identify their sexuality as straight are able to enlarge the limits of their own sexuality, thus destabilizing to some extent a gay/straight binary. A previous study of the Village in Manchester carried out by Les Moran and Bev Skeggs (2004), however, looked at the use of Manchester's Gay Village by three different groups: gay men, lesbians and straight women. The study considered how for straight women who are excluded from or do not want to be part of what they experience as intimidating heterosexual masculine culture, the Village offers a safe alternative. The researchers note that heterosexual masculinity is often an identity formed through violence and that straight women who use the Village do so to escape. According to the research, the use of gay space by straight women that has been fought for by others is fraught with problems, however, since straight women's desire for safety can serve to undermine the safety felt by others. The presence of straight women in predominantly gay male space makes lesbian women, for example, feel particularly uncomfortable. Lesbian women it is pointed out do not feel physically threatened, but they do feel that

the presence of straight women in a space in which they have always been marginal makes the space no longer theirs at all to use. Moran and Skeggs argue that straight women and gay men share things in common but identify straight white working class men who follow straight women into the area as constituting a threat to the Village as a gay space. Straight women also complain, according to the researchers, that straight men make the area less attractive and safe for them. In a study with Jon Binnie, however, Bev Skeggs (2004) links straight female use of the Village to consumption, thus arguing that in a space where being gay is required to make 'appropriate' or 'proper' (p. 40) use of it, straight women consume the space by deploying a discourse of cosmopolitanism through which they legitimate their right to make use of it.

What my own study seeks to demonstrate is that through engagement with 'things' that they imagine to be gay while they are using the Village space, men and women who self-identify their sexuality as straight, far from consuming gay sexuality, attempt to self-create their own sense of themselves as heterosexuals. As such, the study is concerned with the way in which straight use of the Village questioned the basis on which a separate gay community had been created. Many of the younger gay men and women who frequented the area were themselves more interested in being just like everyone else, in being allowed to live their sexuality in a way that works for them as individuals rather than collectively as a group. Being gay it seemed was no longer what

centrally defined gay sexuality, or at least proved to be problematic as a basis for maintaining a separate gay space that excluded men and women who self-identified their sexuality as straight. Differentiated positions did, however, continue to exist since the Village had become an exclusive space that catered predominantly to young 'aesthetes'. Among the groups marginalised are lesbians, older gay men and men and women in the process of 'coming out' who feel that they have been relegated to support groups run by the local Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF).

The study is also about the much wider social, economic and political changes that were taking place in Manchester. It shows that far from existing as a separate gay community, the Village had alongside other cultural quarters within the city been fed into an overarching image of the 'new Manchester' that served the greater good of the wider city. In this way, the area had been remade to conform to late capitalism's demands in the sense that what the City Council and newer bar and club owners were imposing was, in the view of many gay people, a commoditisation of gay sexuality in a space that had already been occupied and informed by other representations of being gay. The very concept of what it meant to have a Gay Village was constantly dictated by the wider city in which it existed.

At the time, many gay people felt that their own understandings of what it meant to be gay, as they had been informed by the gay liberationist approach to sexuality, were fragmenting within the Village space. That is not to say, however, that many gay people no longer desired a separate 'gay community' which is, in fact, where a number of tensions set in. Many of these tensions centred on concerns as to whether use of the Village by straight men and women represented real acceptance of gay people or just of a commoditisation of gay sexuality that they could engage with and constitute for themselves. Many gay people also felt that the City Council and some of the newer bar and club owners favoured the Village primarily for economic reasons rather than out of a concern for social equality. In this way, they also felt that the City Council and newer bar and club owners had shifted appropriation of the Village away from gay people to others for their own ends. The Village was therefore a contested space in the sense that many gay people felt that the area was no longer controlled by members of the gay community. There were many threads to the issues but in terms of men and women who self-identified their sexuality as straight using the space these generally included a concern among gay people about being the object of the gaze and of needing to be more inhibited in behaviour. Groups who felt they were still victims of discrimination such as those still in the process of 'coming out' of the closet with their sexuality, older gay men and lesbians also felt that there were still real obstacles to overcome with respect to homophobic prejudice. Many of these groups felt that an area

that they had largely made their own had been diluted as a centre of gay empowerment. While many straight men and women therefore cleaved to the notion of the right to create themselves by using the area, this freedom was always an anxious one as many gay people struggled to make sense of this diversity and increasing integration.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is structured as an ethnography that blends traditional thick description of places, spaces and events with the reflexivity and voices of my co-conversationalists.

Chapter 1 presents the methods used to carry out the research and also gives an interim summary of the material presented, explaining which data has been selected for detailed analysis and why. I also discuss some of the implications of carrying out sexuality research as a gay anthropologist.

Chapter 2 describes the kind of socio-cultural context that Manchester as a city now is and sets out the basis on which the Village was originally created by gay activists. It then considers the way in which this activism was incorporated into local government politics and the effect on the Village of a switch in local

government policy from working with gay activists to working with those with business interests in the area.

Chapter 3 describes the Village in terms of the different kinds of venues within the area. It shows how far from existing as a single gay community the area actually consists of a range of very different kind of spaces. As such, individual Village users frequented some venues and deliberately avoid others, depending on their experiences and perceptions of the categories 'gay' and 'straight'.

Chapter 4 looks at groups within the gay community who were less regular users of the Village, namely older gay men, lesbian women and men and women in the process of 'coming out'. It explores the way in which many of the people who belong to these groups cleave to older ideas about being gay and being straight, their experiences and perceptions of how the Village has changed over the years and the ways in which they now feel they are unable to identify with the Village and what to their minds it now represents.

Chapter 5 reviews the material presented by comparing its findings to those of other anthropological studies of gay and lesbian communities carried out within the Anglo-American context. It also steps back to consider what my own material contributes to relevant theoretical perspectives within the anthropology of gender and sexuality and space and place.

To conclude I discuss the importance of key findings in the material presented and outline the contributions that I have made to the anthropological study of sexuality as well as to anthropological theory and methodology. I also suggest possibilities for future research.

1. The Context of the Study

My fieldwork in Manchester was carried out between January and December 2003. However, I had been familiar with the Village since I arrived in Manchester as an undergraduate student in the early 1990s. It was at this time that men and women who self-identified their sexuality as 'straight' first began to frequent the area in large numbers. It was also during the early 1990s that concern began to mount within Manchester's gay community over whether or not straight men and women should be allowed to use so-called 'gay space'. In choosing to study why men and women who self-identify their sexuality as straight wish to frequent the Village my aim was to provide ethnographic insights into the ways in which the changing social, economic and political conditions of Manchester as a city might be leading many straight users of the area to negotiate new conceptions of gay and straight sexuality. Given that not all gay people are accepting of straight men and women using the Village, however, a further aim of the study was also to explore ethnographically how 'gay space' reproduces contested understandings of sexuality which reflect institutional, commercial and community interests as well as differentiated power relations of gender, class and age. As already noted, two studies of heterosexual use of the Village in Manchester were carried out outside of the discipline of social anthropology

in the mid-1990s. However, in linking straight men's and women's use of the area initially to homophobic violence (Moran and Skeggs 2004) and later to consumption (Skeggs and Binnie 2004), I felt that neither study had captured what I believe are more dramatic changes in how many users of the area now experience and perceive the categories 'gay' and 'straight'. Or at least by the time I started my fieldwork, the issues had moved on.

Having made a long term shift from industrial production to cultural production, issues of identity are now very much at the core of Manchester's new political economy. The commoditisation of gay sexuality relied on the creation of an image that characterised young gay men, in particular, as more individualistic and style conscious with few family commitments, more disposable income and more free time. And this is how many straight men and women who chose to engage with images of 'things' that they experienced and perceived to be gay through their use of the Village space fantasised about creating their own sense of themselves[1].

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[1] The Village has been strategically incorporated into a dedicated 'Image' steering group which aims to market Manchester as 'a lifestyle destination' that offers each individual a unique urban 'experience' and thus change their perceptions of the city as whole by making it a place that they aspire to be associated with. The steering group is run by Marketing Manchester, a public-private partnership established in 1996 as the agency to promote Manchester nationally and internationally.

This shift from industrial production to cultural production and its impact on the changing nature of the relationship that many people now have to the categories 'gay' and 'straight' will be familiar ground to anyone following current theoretical debates about the construction of the subject in the late capitalist age (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001, Giddens 1992, Salecl 2006). Whereas academic theories within the social sciences always used to emphasise the social and cultural construction of the self, under late capitalism, the self is now understood to be an open-ended life project that has to be self-created (Giddens 1991, p.26). The emphasis is no longer on social and cultural determinants but on the individual project of self-creating in an attempt at securing one's own 'individual' sense of self. Such individualism also involves a 'fantasisation' of the 'self' as one that refuses to accept the idea that society can set limits on self-aspiration owing to late capitalism's endless drive on consumer choice (Salecl 2006, p.1). This is the context in which sexuality has been made central to a seductive call to transcend the limits of the self. Within the United Kingdom at the moment, sexuality's apparent lack of limits is evident in ideas about the fact that the new reproductive technologies offer the possibility of having children of one's own through artificial insemination; or in looking at the effects on sexuality of technology such as the internet where through disembodiment in virtual reality, people can live out their sexual fantasies with others, who may or may not be who they claim to be in an embodied sense, through so-called cybersex. These attempts to transcend the

limits of the self are, of course, fiercely opposed by those who argue for a return to an emphasis on traditional family values and religious faith but this new form of sexuality which lacks authentic content is nonetheless increasingly becoming central to many people's lives.

In this study, I look at the changes underway within the Village in Manchester in this light. Heterosexual use of the area forced people to deal with ideas which focused on diversity rather than difference as straight male and female Village users sought to create their own sense of what it meant to them to be straight from the perspective of being gay. Whereas the concept of difference had always implied a stable difference between the two categories, the concept of diversity focuses more on the continual process through which categories such as 'gay' and 'straight', have to be self-created by individuals, in order for them to continue to exist. What this meant in practice, was that Village users held a range of interpretations of what it meant to them to be gay or to be straight within themselves. Such interpretations made issues of gay and straight sexuality more complex than they had been when they were simply viewed as different collective groups within the world. This was partly due to the fact that gay sexuality had come to be experienced and perceived by many as something that could attach as much to 'things' imagined to be gay, which straight as well as gay people could engage with, as much as what it attached to persons themselves. In this way previously taken for granted assumptions about the

authenticity of the categories 'gay' and 'straight' were being negotiated by straight male and female users of the Village in the constituting of themselves as their own individual subjects. While many straight men and women regarded engagement with this commoditised form of gay sexuality as personally liberating in that it allowed them to enlarge the limits of their own sexuality, many gay people felt that their own understandings of what it meant to be gay, as they had been informed by the gay liberationist approach to sexuality, were fragmenting.

The idea that people were somehow free to 'choose' how they wished to create themselves was, of course, a chimera. The changes that were taking place in the Village centrally concerned the City Council and owners of bars and clubs in the area and, as such, it was impossible to ignore the social, economic and political interests and investments that they brought with them which were always in the background. No one was sure where it was all going to end up but the whole issue was nonetheless a hotly debated topic of consideration not only by users of the Village but also within the national, local and gay press.

This study therefore sets out to answer three main research questions as follows: Is it possible for gay sexuality to attach to 'things' that men and women who self-identify their sexuality as straight can engage with as much as well as to persons themselves through the way they define their sexuality? If so, then why in a world of diversity in which people appear, at least, to be free

to self-create themselves, do some people who self-identify their sexuality as gay have a problem with what they experience and perceive to be straight 'interlopers' using the Village space? Does straight use of the Village space destabilize rather than confirm a gay/straight binary and, if this is the case, then in what sense can the Village continue to exist as a separate space for Manchester's gay community?

1. RESEARCH STRATEGY USED TO GATHER DATA

In setting out to answer these questions I used a traditional participant observation based approach to gather data but the main method that I used during fieldwork was life-history interviewing. I then subjected the interview data gathered to a rigorous discourse analysis.

In the last twenty years or so the nature of anthropological enquiry has changed dramatically and so too has the role of the anthropologist in knowledge construction (Strathern 1991). One consequence of this change is that anthropology has come 'home' since cultural difference is not only located in other parts of the world (Jackson 1987; Rapport 2002). What anthropologists investigate has also diversified. If anthropology was once characterised by the four subfields of kinship, religion, economics and politics to this list we can now add a range of other disciplinary concerns, not least the anthropology of

gender and sexuality. Given that anthropological objects of study are no longer only exclusive to anthropology the discipline has also become more interdisciplinary in that it speaks to debates within other disciplines and to critiques that cross-cut all of the social sciences such as feminist and queer theory to mention just two (Moore 1999). While anthropology has responded to these changed circumstances with considerable theoretical innovation (Knauft 1996, 1997, Hastrup 1995, 1997, Moore 1996a, 1999, Strathern 1995, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Marcus 1999) methodologically the discipline has been slower to respond to these changed circumstances. Within anthropology the dominant view remains that participant observation occupies the methodological high ground (Hockey 2002) and is still considered by some to make anthropology anthropology. There was a time, however, when this situation was on the verge of changing due to the impact of a particular set of theories on the discipline that were usually referred to as 'post-modern'.

In the 1980s and early 1990s participant observation was taken to task (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988; Kapferer 1988; Ulin 1991; Sangren 1988; Gellner 1992) with the main thrust of the critique being directed at the authority of the anthropologist as author. The anthropologists' ability to make observations, at least in an any kind of absolute way, was seriously in doubt and anthropology as a fieldwork practice came under attack for producing unethical power relations that

dominated and discriminated against others. Such questioning led to a series of uncertainties within the discipline about anthropology's future which at the time was widely believed to be experiencing 'a crisis of representation'. As Marilyn Strathern (1991) neatly put it:

"Anthropology finds itself in a new aesthetic. The fieldworker who translates particular socio-cultural observations no longer convinces: the single author is no longer an image of authenticity, the one culture or society no longer valid as an object of study" (1991, p.8).

Critics of anthropological attempts to represent others through participant observation insisted that if there is a single version of reality at all 'out there' understandings of it are multiple since given differences in our individual identities and positions in the world we all construct and understand things differently. Anthropological representations then could only ever be partial. Critics of anthropological theorizing and ethnographic authority therefore claimed 'reflexivity', 'polyphony' and 'dialogue' as core values for anthropology's self-deconstruction (Clifford 1983). A striking feature of the critique was the 'turn to language'. Many anthropologists began to study language as a means through which to look at the complex ways in which understandings of social reality are produced. This is based on the assumption that knowledge of ourselves and the world is principally

mediated by language and is negotiated through communication between people. Anthropologists showed that while the fieldwork process depends on communication, the shared experience of the anthropologist and his or her co-conversationalists is all too often deleted from the ethnography that is its result. Consequently, the ethnographic account appeared in a new light: it lost its continuity with the fieldwork situation and came to be regarded as a genre that creates its own authority by rhetorical means. This focus on the ethnography of fieldwork communication concentrated on what anthropologists and co-conversationalists share and the way they co-produce anthropological knowledge. As a result there emerged calls for new ways of writing. Stephen Tyler (1986), an advocate of this kind of approach to ethnography, states:

"Because post-modern ethnography privileges "discourse" over "text", it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendent observer. In fact it rejects the ideology of "observer-observed", there being nothing observed and no one who is observer" (1986, p. 126).

Obviously inspired by this critique a number of anthropologists generated what became known within the discipline as 'new' ethnographies which went

some way towards replacing participant observation by capturing to a much greater extent in textual form more reflexive research methods such as interviewing (e.g. Crapanzano 1980; Shostak 1981; Dwyer 1982; Burgos-Debray 1984; Taussig 1986; Werbner 1991; Caplan 1997). These more reflexive accounts specify the discourse of informants as well as that of the anthropologist by textualising dialogues or narrating interpersonal conversations. In anthropological writing of this kind the proper referent of any account is not a 'represented world' but specific instances of discourse. However, the principle of dialogical textual production not only presented ethnography as being based upon a series of encounters with others but also highlighted the unequal power relations, domination and discrimination that is present in many fieldwork contexts. Culture was figured as a relative concept, an inscription of communicative processes that exist historically between subjects in relations of power. Whereas in classic ethnographies reflexivity, polyphony and dialogue were limited by providing the anthropologist with a strong authorial function, in these new kinds of ethnographies it is claimed many voices express themselves. The tendency to specify discourses intersubjectively recasts the authority of the anthropologist in a new light. Hence the anthropologist is constructed as being part of a discipline that has claimed to be able to represent others when in fact ethnography according to the post-modern critique should capture culture as a process that resists any final summary.

Despite this critique, however, within anthropology participant observation remains the predominant method used to gather data. But perhaps it was never participant observation itself that was the problem but rather the fact that even anthropology's traditional object of study – 'social structure' - has in the last twenty years changed dramatically and so too have the contexts in which anthropologists now carry out their fieldwork. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (2000) examine the changing contexts in which anthropologists now carry out their fieldwork by exploring the relationship of space and place to anthropology. They question the idea that 'social structure' is unitary, bounded and geographically fixed through a consideration of identity in the context of mass migration, multicultural localities, postcoloniality as well as globalisation. Under these circumstances, instead of being disconnected, contact between what might have once been regarded as geographically separated groups means that the very notion of social and cultural difference has to be reconsidered through the very notion of connection. These changes as George Marcus (1999) points out challenge traditional ideas of doing fieldwork in one place and open up the relatively newer fieldwork practice of multi-sited ethnography which has brought about new ways of imagining anthropology as a discipline in the sense that hybrids, networks and flows are becoming the dominant concepts used. As such, more recent debates within anthropology have started to question what the implications of these changes

are for anthropology as a fieldwork practice. As Tom Rice and Mette Louise Berg (2004) say:

"As the research interests of anthropologists have changed, so have the types of fieldworks that we undertake. Yet the ideal of long-term fieldwork in a rural location among non-Western peoples still exerts a powerful influence on the discipline. While traditional methods such as long-term site work and participant observation are still valid, they now must be complemented by innovative methods that respond to contemporary epistemological challenges. The very notion of 'the field' itself may need critical questioning" (2004, p.6).

Scholars have recently set themselves the task of exploring some of the difficulties inherent in rigidly applying traditional participant observation approaches to the diversity of fieldwork contexts that now define anthropology as a discipline. Adi Kuntsman (2004) views her own fieldwork on homemaking in cyberspace as existing in a complex web of locations and dislocations. Cyberethnography she argues moves anthropology away from distinctions between western and non-western fieldwork settings, between going away or staying at home or doing research online or in offline spaces. Instead her research with Russian speaking gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender immigrants investigates the complexities which make

homemaking in cyberspace such a challenge to dominant ideas in anthropology that emphasise fixed geographical location for both the fieldworker and those with whom he or she works. As Mattia Fumanti (2004) explains the very concept of 'the field' in the singular creates a misleading sense of the anthropologist's agency in his or her fieldwork setting since it is the field which makes both the fieldwork and the fieldworker as much as vice versa. In practice then the agency of the fieldworker only exists in relation to his or her ability to select the most appropriate methods in response to the conditions which make up 'the field'. Rather than asserting our authority over 'the field' a flexible rather than inflexible research strategy is what very often becomes essential in fieldwork. As such, Fumanti notes that just as anthropologists have been made aware of the need to pay attention to the authority of the ethnographic voice they also need to be similarly reflexive in the sense of acknowledging that a range of research strategies in fieldwork are needed in order to allow these voices to express themselves. More credit should be given, in his view, to the complexities that the field presents rather than to the authority of the fieldworker. His arguments are generated from his own fieldwork experiences among the elites of a small town in north-west Namibia. What these arguments demonstrate is that 'the field' is never encountered as an entity that can be made by the ideas or the research strategies of the fieldworker.

British ethnography is not new. Since the 1970s there has been a steady growth in the number of anthropological studies carried out in Britain (e.g. Benson 1981, Strathern 1981, 1992, Okely 1983, Cohen 1987, Werbner 1990, Rapport 1993, Baumann 1996, Green 1997, Edwards 2000, Cassidy 2002, Evans 2006, Day 2007), but individuals with an anthropological interest in Britain continue to have to justify the legitimacy of their work. According to Maurice Bloch, the most outspoken critic of British ethnography, fieldwork in Britain is easy as informants are available for study at the researchers convenience (Bloch in Brown 2002, p. 223). 'Easy' did not sum up my own experience, however. Given that the Village was primarily a leisure space consisting mainly of bars and clubs which people used during their free time to unwind, getting the opportunity to chat to people in an extended way in this context was extremely difficult. During the evenings activity tended to centre around loud music and the consumption of alcohol and while during the daytime it was quieter there were fewer people around due to the fact that most were out at work. I therefore had to recruit many of my co-conversationalists in a 'disembodied' way by relying on them to come forward to take part in the study by putting advertisements about my research in one of Manchester's widely available magazines *City Life* and in one of the less widely available gay weekly magazines, *The Pink Paper*. I also spoke about my research on BBC Radio Manchester, on a programme that went on air on Thursday evenings called *Gay Talk*. In each case I explained the nature of my research and invited

users of the Village to participate anonymously. My hope was to find as diverse a range of sources as possible to initiate a 'snowball' sampling strategy.

However, I was aware that users of the Village were predominantly young, male and white. In addition to the advertisements I therefore discussed my project with organisers on the Lesbian and Gay Foundation's helpline in an attempt to try and recruit more older gay people, lesbians and minority ethnic groups to take part in the study. The helpline put me in contact with a number of support groups that they ran which were designed to act as fora in which gay people could express their concerns and serve as a place where they could make friends. I was invited to discuss my research with four groups: 40+ Gay Men's Group, Sapphos for Older Lesbians, Icebreakers and Stepping Stones. The latter two groups were for men and women in the process of 'coming out'. People's homes and places of work were scattered across Manchester and beyond. Home lives were also frequently regarded as 'private' space while many people's places of work did not lend themselves very easily to a participant observation based methodological approach. Places of work are often also the last place where people reveal their sexuality. For many gay people leisure spaces like the Village or the Lesbian and Gay Foundation are seen as 'transformative' places where they can be themselves, to the extent that they make a strong public/private distinction

and actively seek to keep people out of their home and work lives. The amount of information that I was able to glean about these aspects of people's lives was therefore more limited. While I lived by myself in a one bedroom duplex apartment in a regenerated Victorian school house overlooking the Village I was, of course, able to visit some of my co-conversationalists in their homes once they had become friends, especially where they also lived in the Village. I managed to gain most of my information about people's home and work lives, however, from the life-history interview.

As Jenny Hockey (2003) says the conditions an anthropologist faces working in the British social environment often seem incompatible with the fieldwork methods used to generate classic non-western anthropological studies. Given that home lives are regarded as private and the fact that the weather is bad for ten months of the year people are not constantly accessible to the anthropologist for conversation in an extended way. The life-history interview is therefore a culturally appropriate form of participation for fieldwork carried out in Britain. In many ways argues Hockey the interview also resembles many aspects of British social and cultural life where communication between people often takes place in a 'disembodied' way over, for example, the telephone, email or through technology such as the internet. That is not to undermine the value of fieldwork that anthropologists have built up over the years that has been based on participant observation or

to compare one approach against the other. It is, however, to recognise that qualitative interview data can generate material of a quality that matches participant observation and therefore be seen as more suitable for Western fieldwork settings for more than just pragmatic reasons. In the British cultural context argues Hockey, the interview is very often what constitutes ethnography.

Indeed my own experience of carrying out research on sexuality in Britain suggests that owing to the fact that where gay sexuality is concerned there is very often an 'epistemology of the closet' (Sedgwick 1991) based on secrecy and outings, sexuality would also have been a particularly difficult area to research primarily through participant observation. Due to the complex nature of the range of understandings of what it meant to be gay and to be straight that people also had within themselves, the act of speaking about sexuality was particularly crucial. Only highly reflexive research methods such as the life-history interview could have captured this complexity by allowing me to explore shifts in people's understandings of sexuality as they themselves experience and perceive them over time.

In order to try and gain a wide cross-section of different views on the Village I recruited a range of gay, straight and lesbian men and women. The aim was to generate enough material to be able to carry out a rigorous analysis of the

issue and I aimed to conduct a larger number of interviews than what anthropologists perhaps generally do given the more limited opportunities to carry out participant observation. Once I had interviewed 100 people I felt that I had gathered enough material as my co-conversationalists did not seem to be telling me anything new. Recruitment of interviewees therefore stopped.

As mentioned above, I recruited my co-conversationalists through snowball sampling techniques so as to incorporate a diversity of age class and racial identifications. I was open and honest from the start about the purpose of my research interests in heterosexual use of the so-called 'gay space' of the Village in Manchester and as my fieldwork progressed, many became enthusiastically involved in the study. The strategies were very successful and I quickly gained access to a wide cross section of gay and straight Village users as well as people who felt that their own identities as gay people were incompatible with those expressed in the Village space. Together they represented a diversity of gender, age, class, occupation, attitudes and interests, but unfortunately very few of these people came from minority ethnic groups. This could be because minority ethnic groups are few in number within this particular gay community which was a surprising finding given that as a city Manchester is ethnically diverse, or it may be because such groups are harder to recruit using a snowball sampling strategy.

Of the 100 people interviewed 70 self-identified as 'gay' and 30 as 'straight'. Of the 70 gay people interviewed 42 self-identified as middle class and 28 as working class, only 2 came from minority ethnic groups. Within the category 'gay' 8 women self-identified as 'lesbian' rather than 'gay'. Of the 30 straight people interviewed 24 self-identified as middle class and 6 as working class. None were from minority ethnic groups. In addition to interviewing Village users, I also interviewed officials from the City Council and the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, owners or managers of Village bars and clubs and the organiser of the city's annual Pride festival.

A semi-structured life-history approach was taken to interviewing both Village users and users of the Lesbian and Gay Foundation. The interviews were initially piloted on 10 people to check that I was getting the desired kind of data and that my interviewees were content with the questions. I took each interviewee through a list of topics that I had prepared beforehand (see Appendix A). While these were not covered in any particular order at the beginning of the interview I tended to cover their sexuality and how they had come to define it, if they had, before moving on to general issues such as the Village, the extent to which the interviewee felt the Village represented a community, what they thought about straight use of the space and so on. Once I had been chatting to the interviewee for some time I then moved on to aspects of their personal biography such as age and class. A flexible 'conversational'

style' was adopted throughout each interview to allow for lengthy responses and I did not restrict interviewees to answering questions about topics in a fixed order. However, interviewees usually covered the topics that I had prepared at some point during the interview which reassured me that the topics that I had prepared were relevant. I was surprised at the ease with which my co-conversationalists spoke to me and many said they had found the interview therapeutic in the sense that it had helped them to understand and make more sense of certain aspects of their lives. Interviews lasted anywhere between roughly one and six hours and except in just two cases were tape-recorded after gaining consent from and ensuring the confidentiality of interviewees. Throughout my co-conversationalists were encouraged to ask questions about me, about the research and about the interview if they wished. They were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the research process at anytime. All the names of individual men and women that I interviewed for the study have been changed to protect their anonymity. In my writing, however, I have tried extremely hard to capture the highly reflexive nature of my fieldwork by allowing my co-conversationalists a considerable amount of textual space so that their 'voices' can be heard. Also, I have not explicitly attempted to give my co-conversationalists 'one voice', as such an endeavour seems to me somewhat impossible given that they had multiple experiences and perceptions within themselves of what the categories 'gay' and 'straight' meant to them. Instead, I

have tried to interconnect their different understandings and draw on their testimonies but, of course, interpretation of them remains my own.

As a methodological approach, however, relying on research participants to 'self-identify' aspects of their own identities is not without its problems, especially in the context of the Village where what it means to people to be gay and to be straight is not self-evident to people. While all of my research participants self-identified as either gay or straight, for example, a small number said that they had experimented with some form of intimacy that was contrary to how they defined their sexuality. Yet this did not affect their self-identification of their sexuality in categorical terms. Owing to the fact that there is an `epistemology of the closet' (Sedgwick 1991) when it comes to gay sexuality based on secrecy and 'outings', how much weight is it possible to attach to the testimonies of people about this aspect of their lives, especially given that sexual relations are the most private form of intimacy that people have with others. Equally how can we ever be completely sure then that some of the purportedly straight users of the Village are not simply closet cases who have found a way of safely remaining in the straight world by exploring their gay orientation under the guise of self-expression through gay lifestyle, so that they are thus in effect able to keep one foot in the closet and one foot out? Or to put it another way, how can we be sure that the emphasis that they place on engagement with things that they imagine to be gay as opposed to the sexuality

of gay people themselves is not really a function of their inability to accept their own gay tendencies?

I also encountered similar problems when relying on my co-conversationalists to self-identify which class they felt they belonged to, if they felt they belonged to one at all, of course. Scholars are currently struggling to theorise social class. Up until recently the dominant view of social class within the social sciences was derived from Marxist theory whereby employment status was viewed as the main measure of whether someone belongs to the working, middle or upper or ruling class. Using employment status as a determinant of social class meant that unskilled and semi-skilled workers constituted the working-class while professional or managerial workers were regarded as belonging to the middle class with a very small minority who control the means of production being regarded as the upper or ruling class. Within the social sciences class has historically therefore been discussed in the context of class consciousness, particularly working-class consciousness and whether the working class could ever live up to the role that Marx identified for them as being a 'class for itself' capable of overthrowing the ruling class and thus capitalist means of production (Devine *et al* 2005, p.5). In the United Kingdom where class identities have historically been very strong a person's class background has long been assumed to be a strong determinant not only of political party affiliation but also as an indicator of attitude and values. As such, the debate about class-

consciousness generated a number of empirical studies which became influential within all social science disciplines including anthropology. One example, is the classic sociological study by Dennis *et al* (1956) which illustrated how brutal the working conditions were for a mining community in Featherstone in West Yorkshire and the way in which these conditions generated a strong sense of occupational solidarity between men. The miner's distinctive way of life also generated strong family and community ties that influenced working-class cultural values. For example, a strong 'them' and 'us' distinction between the working and ruling class was upheld not to mention a particular loyalty towards trade unions and the Labour Party, even if this association fell a long way short of Marx's conception of revolutionary class-consciousness. Scholars have noted, however, how affluence in the late 1950s and 1960s led to the fragmentation of a culturally distinct working-class (e.g. Abrams *et al* 1960; Zwieg 1961, Goldthorpe 1968a, b, 1969). Such affluence it was argued undermined the beliefs and values traditionally associated with the working class in the sense that to a certain extent a new working class of privatised workers started to emerge who saw themselves as middle class. As such, they distanced themselves from the Labour Party and the trade unions. As Goldthorpe *et al* noted (1968a, b, 1969), however, while affluence was enjoyed it came only with the continuation of long, dull, boring, repetitive work that had always characterised working class life. Lifestyles might have been privatised - in the sense that this new breed of working class started to buy their own homes

and so on but they were still not middle class in form in terms of their beliefs and values.

Recent discussions of class in the British context illustrate how official measures of class based on employment status have become increasingly unreliable as measures of class status (Crompton 1998; Lash and Urry 1994; Lockwood 1988). This is partly due to changes in the UK's industrial base which has seen a decline in heavy industry and also changes in terms of patterns of educational attainment. In 1962 only 6 per cent of the British population attained, for example, a university education. Therefore not only was going to university considered an elite thing to do, the chances were also much higher of a university graduate securing a relatively well paid professional job. At the present time, however, 43 per cent of the British population go on to attain a university education and the current Labour government has a participation target in place to ensure that by 2010 50 per cent of the British population do so[2]. Pursuing a university education is no longer a particularly elite thing to do and so no longer does it always confer the rewards that it once did. Today's graduates frequently find themselves working jobs for which they are overqualified and not financially well remunerated. Equally, however, not all non-graduates are poorly paid. At the time of fieldwork stories were beginning to circulate about a new breed of so-called "middle class" plumbers and

[2] Department for Education and Skills (2003) *The Future of Higher Education*, Stationery Office.

electricians whose skills were in such short supply that they could command a higher salary than many graduates. A story appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper about an Oxford graduate in modern languages, for example, who was reported to have given up her well paid job as an investment banker at a top financial institution in the City of London to become a plumber. Similarly another newspaper article appeared in *The Guardian* about middle class families spending vast amounts of money to put their sons through professional football training despite the fact that historically in Britain football has been regarded as a working class man's sport. It is now one of the most lucrative professions in the country.

As a category class is becoming extremely difficult to measure with any degree of accuracy. Does the fact that increasing numbers of young people now go on to university to attain a degree mean that the middle class have expanded or that university education itself is no longer a measure of class given that today's graduates do not always find themselves in professional employment in the way that previous generations of university graduates did? More recent class analysis has started to focus on the cultural dimensions of class (e.g. Bradley 1996, 1999, Crompton 1998, Charlesworth 2000, Devine 1992a, 1998, Savage 2000, Skeggs 1997, Reay 1998, Bennett *et al* 1999, Lawler 2000a) some of which relates to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' (e.g. Skeggs 2005). What Bourdieu's work does of course is link beliefs, values and crucially taste to class

identity so that class comes to be based on how much social, economic and cultural capital people possess and can use to benefit their own advancement. Cultural capital can only be used successfully in particular fields and by people with the required 'habitus'. Fields consist of spaces through which different subject positions between different interest groups are played out. As Pierre Bourdieu (1993) says:

> "In order for a field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes and so on" (1993:72).

In other words, fields only work when people with the correct 'habitus', in terms of their socially acquired subject positions, are skilful enough and interested enough in accruing capital from whatever the stakes on offer in a particular field appear to be. Inspired by Bourdieu, Bev Skeggs (2005) repositions class as a concept of culture by showing how it is difficult for people without middle class resources to construct themselves as culturally sophisticated subjects. The way I attempted to overcome this problem of deciding which accounts should be taken literally in terms of how people self-define sexuality and class was through participant observation. I therefore spent a great deal of time doing participant observation in different Village venues to gain a better understanding of which kinds of venues my

interviewees and/or others similar to them did and did not frequent and why. I also spent a great deal of time with users of the support groups at the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, many of whom did not frequent the Village at all or did so to a lesser extent. I also conducted many of my interviews in Village venues which I allowed my interviewees to choose. This gave me the opportunity to find out what kind of bars my interviewees preferred to frequent and also allowed me to ask what people thought about the venue in which we were. Although because I wanted to achieve high quality recordings I tended to do this early on in the week when Village venues were quieter and in the late afternoon or early evening before the music got too loud. Where I interviewed those who frequented support groups I equally carried out interviews in interview rooms at the Lesbian and Gay Foundation.

2. RESEARCHING SEXUALITY AS A GAY ANTHROPOLOGIST

A more reflexive approach to fieldwork also requires a degree of self-reflexivity on the part of the anthropologist so as to consider the effects of conducting research on both the researcher and those being researched and the status of knowledge claims that the researcher makes. Anthropologists influenced by post-modern critiques on meta-narratives and grand theory tend to be suspicious of generalising tendencies within anthropology that claim that the anthropologist has the authority to speak about others. Instead

they have reflected on how the 'self' of the traditional anthropologist reflects dominant and oppressive ideologies. An important feature of what became known as the post-modern critique of anthropology was its attempt to interrogate oppressive social practices that exclude various social groups and privilege others. Anthropology has been accused of privileging Western, white, male, heterosexual and middle class versions of anthropological knowledge while excluding the experiences of those who do not fit this norm and are positioned as 'other'. Recovering and exploring the experiences of women, black people and non-heterosexual men and women it is argued allows us to create a more inclusive anthropology that accommodates diversity. Work on the role of the anthropologist during fieldwork then has inscribed the anthropologist as a subject whose positioning may be reflexively incorporated into the ethnography, rather than as neutral participant observer. This stance emphasises the self as central to the production of anthropological knowledge, which itself emerges as an effect of partial, rather than culturally absolute relations (Strathern 1991). From this point of view my own sexuality as a gay man emerges as an ethnographic subject who may be written in subjective rather than objective terms. The anthropologist's sexual subjectivity acts as a critical standpoint from which to develop reflexive work (Lewin and Leap 1996, 2002; Kulick and Wilson 1995, Lyons and Lyons 2004, Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999, Robertson 2004, Roscoe 1995, Rubin 2002, Seizer 1995). I believe that many of my co-conversationalists would not have

agreed to speak to me had I myself not been a gay man which seemed to make the act of gathering data during fieldwork seem less intrusive. The fact that I also demonstrated to people that I had a well developed understanding of gender as well as sexuality issues, also seemed to make the vast majority of my lesbian co-conversationalists feel at ease talking to me. In any event, many people would approach me with the names of men and women who had agreed to be interviewed who felt very strongly about the direction that the Village seemed to be moving in and would draw to my attention venues or events that might be of interest. The project was also a popular topic of conversation during social gatherings in the Village where people would jokingly ask me whether my work made a good chat up line or rib me that hanging out in bars and clubs must make for a very difficult life. My co-conversationalists were also keen that I should accomplish my dual mission of both passing my PhD and later converting my thesis into a book for publication.

However, while carrying out research as an openly gay man I did encounter a number of incidents which made me question how my research was being perceived. I was open and honest from the start about the purpose of my research interests in straight use of the Village in Manchester. However, from the beginning many of my co-conversationalists would make the assumption that my research was predominantly gay research and that I saw straight male

and female use of the Village as a problem. This seemed to be an effect of being open about my sexuality as a gay man rather than as a result of the way that I explained my research to people. Although I did not usually mind being positioned as a 'gay anthropologist' and had consciously decided to be open about my sexuality to participants, I did feel it necessary to continually keep reminding people what exactly my research was about – i.e. into what it means to people to be gay, to be straight and to have a gay Village in Manchester at the beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century. I felt that in many ways my experience of being positioned as a gay anthropologist highlighted some of the difficulties of getting people to accept the idea that I was interested in the creation of heterosexuality.

A bigger issue that I encountered, however, than how people perceived my research was maintaining professional boundaries between my role as an anthropologist and my personal life. Given that the Village was my fieldwork site I often felt that I could not switch off from my research when I was out in bars and clubs in my own free time. When out in the Village in my own leisure time I found it difficult not to deconstruct venues and the kind of people they attracted. I therefore had to continually think and rethink my own position as both an anthropologist and as a user of the Village and how I fitted into that context, if I fitted in. On the one hand then being a gay man I felt like an 'insider' to the Village which was generally a strength but being an

anthropologist made me feel like an 'outsider' too in many respects. This increased my understanding of the responsibility that I had to my research participants who had shared often sensitive information about their lives with me. The breaking down of professional boundaries between myself as an anthropologist and my research participants, however, presented other problems by revealing complex power relations. On a number of occasions, for example, some of my research participants whilst out in the Village would express sexual interest in me. Although flattering I did not encourage this kind of attention since although I was 'single' I was somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of forging sexual relations with research participants. My usual strategy was therefore to make it clear to research participants that I was dependent on them for information and that for that reason it was important that our relationships did not extend beyond professional boundaries. In this way, I hoped to remove possible concerns that they might have felt exploited by me as an anthropologist. However, as a strategy this sometimes made me feel powerless, especially as when men expressed sexual interest in me I could not tell them off as I might have done if I was not interested, had I not been an anthropologist conducting research in a bar or club. As an anthropologist, however, I did not feel able to do this, given that I wanted to use the information that research participants had provided me with. I did not want to get into a confrontational situation with any of my research participants that might prompt them to withdraw from the study. I was therefore usually left

trying to diplomatically shift their attention away from me rather than saying what I really thought about the interest that they were expressing in me. These situations, however, made me much more aware of sexual interest while in the company of research participants and for this reason, unless I knew them well, I stopped conducting interviews with men in my own home for personal safety reasons.

3. A DISCOURSE-CENTRED APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

I used a discourse-centred approach to analyse my data. It is not possible to speak of 'discourse' or 'discourse analysis' as a single unitary entity. There are a variety of different brands of discourse analysis with multiple philosophical origins, each of which involves different styles of analysis. According to advocates of a discourse-centred approach to anthropology however (e.g. Sapir 1949, Urban 1991, Sherzer 1987, Hymes 1964 1971) culture is constituted and continuously configured and reconfigured through dialogues between its members. Within anthropology discourse analysis is not defined by analysis of grammar as it is in many discourse-centred approaches used in other social science disciplines whereby Chomskian style generative linguistics discourses are analysed as if they are generated by individuals independent of socio-cultural context. Within the discipline of anthropology such a view of discourse is viewed as untenable since when discourse is viewed in socio-cultural context

the assumption that language use is underpinned by a single grammar is questionable (Hymes 1971, Silverstein 1976, Woodbury 1987, Ellis 1994, Urciuoli 1996). Instead discourse-centred approaches to anthropology view language use as context dependent rather than as the sole focus of analysis. As Bonnie Urciuoli says:

"Meaning does not inhere to words or grammar alone, and language function – the social meaning of what people say – goes well beyond the semantic-referential function or dictionary sense of meaning" (Urciuoli in Bernard 1998).

As a method of analysis a discourse-centred approach was crucial to my own work. In the context of the Village in Manchester individual experiences and perceptions of what it means to be gay and to be straight were shaping social and cultural conceptions of sexuality as much as what these same experiences and perceptions were being shaped by social and cultural determinants themselves. A triangulated approach to data gathering was used in my own research which looked at the different understandings that my three sets of stakeholders had of sexuality and the interrelationships that were implied, if any. A discourse centred approach to anthropology not only enabled me to pay attention to language as constitutive of the social and cultural system that it forms but also to the multiple rather than unitary and fixed nature of the language that people use to negotiate meaning. In this approach I use grammar

but what lies central to each construction is not the same grammatical terms, but the variety of different constructions of sexuality used. As such, a thematic reading of text taken from taped interviews was undertaken which attempted to separate a given text into coherent themes.

The research objectives are set out as follows. The first aim was to analyse the text in terms of the variety of different constructions of gay and straight sexuality used. The idea that different constructions exist and are used in discourse contradicts the assumption in much previous anthropological research that the gay/straight binary exists as a given entity, *a priori* defined as sexual practice (Vance 2005). The second aim was to identify how these different constructions of sexuality were used. For example, some of the understandings put forward contested traditional ideas of what it means to be gay and to be straight in terms of something that a person essentially is, a central element of which is sexual practice; other understandings related to whether these newer negotiations of gay sexuality were valid. In other words, the former arguments related to contesting the essence of a construction of sexuality while the latter arguments related to whether sexuality could be understood in terms of a variety of constructions. And the third aim of the analysis was to critically explore the relationship between people's different understandings of gay identity. Discourse analysis was chosen as the main method of analysis of data because it involved multiple and contradictory

understandings of what it means to be gay based on interview data with three different groups – institutional (City Council, Pride organiser), commercial (bar and club owners and managers) and community stakeholders (Village users) and because it is in words that people's experiences and perceptions of what it means to be gay and to be straight reside. For bar and club owners business interests were at stake, for the City Council there was a social and economic regeneration strategy at stake and for Village users there was an identity that had been fought for by many gay people at stake.

Before attempting analysis, a process of coding began. To carry out a detailed discourse analysis it is necessary to preserve as much of the complexity of everyday speech as possible. I therefore created verbatim transcripts of 62 of my interviews. I also noted the tones of dialogues and the manner in which they were expressed which I have noted in square brackets [laughs], [said nervously]. Throughout my transcripts I used ellipsis (...) to denote a pause in an interviewees speech. I organised my transcripts into chunks of discourse which I coded according to my research questions. This approach enabled me to quickly select the most relevant data for analyses. Typical codes used to answer question one about whether individuals can be gay both in terms of sexuality and through their engagement with things experienced and perceived to be gay within the Village space focused on sexual practice which was usually defined as 'sexual orientation', 'sexuality' or in terms of 'coming out' as

well on 'things' such as 'clothes', 'music' or bar or club 'atmosphere'. Typical codes used to answer question two about why many gay people have a problem with what they experience and perceive to be straight 'interlopers' using the so-called gay space of the Village focused on the insider:outsider dichotomy and included words such as 'gay', 'straight' 'lesbian', 'man', 'woman', 'working class', 'middle class', 'old' and 'young'. The codes used to answer question three were broadly the same as those used for the first two questions. The unencoded remainder of the transcripts were also examined to identify any patterns of discourse that were repeated and these sections were given a code. In addition, any areas that seemed contradictory but which were related to my research questions were also coded. Because of the volume of transcript material I found it easier to print transcripts out and code them by cutting them up and arranging similarly coded quotes together.

I spent a great deal of time reading and re-reading transcripts to become familiar with them. After becoming familiar with the interviews I looked at similarly coded sections and took decisions in relation to which parts to select and subject to detailed analysis. In this way, I aimed to elaborate also the consistencies and inconsistencies within discursive patterns between transcripts. Systematic patterns that appeared significant in the dialogue of participants, both from the point of view of my own research questions and to the participants themselves, were tentatively labelled as discourses and thus

subjected to further study. In terms of looking at a discourse I looked for consistency and variability within a discursive pattern. There would often be differences, for example, in the discourses of gay and straight people and other factors such as gender, class, race and age would also often disrupt the consistency of discourse. As such, I have tried to elaborate these differences within my analysis. Developing the analysis into ethnographic chapters required constant reflection on why I thought particular discourses were significant to the study in terms of how they fitted in with the research questions. To test the validity of my findings I questioned the coherence of my analysis by asking how well it appeared to explain the patterns of dialogue that I was examining. I also asked what the significance of the discourse in my participants' dialogue was and whether this appeared to be important in their discussions with me. I also questioned how good my own analysis of discursive patterns was by asking whether I was generating new experiences and perceptions on existing issues or filling gaps in the academic literature. Once satisfied that these criteria had been met I knew that I had established a sound basis for analysis of the material presented.

The main findings of the discourse analysis will now be discussed in three parts which broadly relate to the three research questions set out at the beginning of this chapter. The first part will look at what it means to be gay and to be straight from the perspective of the different views of institutional,

commercial and community stakeholders (question 1). The second part will then draw out what these understandings imply for how we go about defining gay sexuality in the Village space (question 2). And the third part will look at the relationship between the different understandings each stakeholder has and what this means for the nature of the gay/straight binary and the future of the Village as a separate gay space (question 3).

4. DISCOURSES OF SEXUALITY

Two discourses of sexuality emerge from the interview transcripts in chapters 2, 3 and 4 which suggest that gay sexuality can attach to images of 'things' as much as to persons and that men and women who self-identify as straight can engage with both to define their sexuality. As a space, the Village reproduces contested understandings of sexuality which reflect institutional, commercial and community interests as well as differentiated power relations of gender, class and age. Within the area, for example, bars are divided into 'old' and 'new'. Owners or managers of the older bars tend to cleave to older ideas of what it means to be gay, as they were informed by the gay liberationist approach to sexuality, which emphasised being gay as the basis for having a space like the Village. In contrast owners or managers of the newer bars in the area take a more commoditised view of gay sexuality which allows men and women who self-identify their sexuality as straight to use the Village. Newer

bar owners, not to mention those who have institutional interests in the area (e.g. the City Council and Manchester Pride), have a vested interest in emphasising the newer more commoditised approach to sexuality because their own economic interests are at stake on which a 'culture-led' regeneration strategy is also based. For many older generations of gay people, however, the addition of this newer perspective of gay sexuality undermines what it means to be gay as they themselves feel they have determined it through the way they define their sexuality. It also threatens the existence of the Village as a separate gay space that many older generations of gay people in particular feel they had to fight hard for.

5. DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY

The two approaches to sexuality expressed themselves in spatial terms as a contradiction between the concept of difference and the concept of diversity. Gay and straight Village users therefore navigate their way through the area and thus find the venues where they feel they best fit in. Older bars in the area tend to cater predominantly to gay people for whom being gay is essentially defined by how people themselves define their sexuality. As such, men and women who self-identify their sexuality as straight are not welcome in these bars. The vast majority of straight male and female Village users also avoid the older style venues. Many straight users of the area found such

venues frightening and did not wish to be accused of homophobia or to feel embarrassed by being too out of place. It is the newer bars in the area that cater predominantly to both a gay and straight clientele or even mainly to a straight clientele, that straight men and women tend to frequent.

As a space, the Village does not predominantly cater to older gay men, men and women in the process of coming out or to lesbians. Where older men frequent the Village they tend to frequent the older style gay venues. The Village was felt to be particularly undesirable by large numbers of lesbians who felt that representations of the space were predominantly gay male. The presence of straight men and women in the area also creates particular problems for lesbian women. Straight male and female users of the area tend to engage with their own 'individual' images of 'things' that they associate with young gay men. However, straight women often make homophobic comments about lesbians and many lesbian women complain that straight men subject them to their own sexual fantasies which they find threatening. Men and women in the process of 'coming out' equally feel that the Village is not a very 'safe space' for them given that they risk running into heterosexual male and female users of the space with whom they may not have come out of the closet.

As the interview extracts in chapter 4 show many of those whom the Village marginalises choose to use support groups run by the local Lesbian and Gay Foundation. However, while the Village is generally felt to be desirable for young gay men, many do complain that given that the area has increasingly become the epicentre for a commoditisation of gay sexuality it has become very difficult to meet people with whom to forge gay intimate and sexual relations. This may suggest that within the Village space being gay has to a greater extent come to be defined through 'things' that people experience and perceive to be gay rather than through the way that people themselves define their own sexuality.

6. IMPACT OF DIVERSITY ON THE COMMUNITY

The discourse analysis reveals that within the Village space a gay/straight binary still exists but due to the commoditisation of gay sexuality the categories 'gay' and 'straight' lack authentic content. Many older generations of gay people wanted to maintain a separate gay community, but resented the kind of space that the Village as a whole was becoming. They associated the most authentic sense of gay community with a requirement to be gay. Given that defining one's sexuality as gay was not required to use the Village space, the purpose of the existence of the area as a whole was therefore continually being questioned. There was much concern over whether heterosexual use of the space allowed

gay people to authentically express their sexuality or imposed a new set of restrictions which required them to be more inhibited in their behaviour.

What I emphasise throughout the study is that the construction of boundaries on the basis of sexuality which existed between the Village and the rest of the city in which it existed were blurred by large numbers of heterosexual men and women using the space. In this sense the Village in Manchester contrasts with other anthropological studies of gay and lesbian communities which emphasise being gay or lesbian as the basis for using gay space. In this study I therefore argue that what the categories 'gay and 'straight' meant was continually being questioned and debated. As such, during the time that I carried out my fieldwork in Manchester, the basis upon which the Village had been created as a separate space to serve as the fulcrum for Manchester's gay community, was fragmenting. Towards the end of fieldwork there was evidence that some bar and club owners were once again trying to recreate, through the return of two venues to their original spatial location within the Village, what to many of my co-conversationalists' minds once captured the essence of what it meant to have a Gay Village. However, with a few years having passed since both venues opened their doors the first time around, the original gay identity that they brought to the area and tried to set about restoring on their return, was soon lost and incorporated into the predominance of a post-gay way of thinking about sexuality which characterised the fragmentation of the gay

community as it centred on the Village as a whole. This study therefore goes beyond the limits of a gay community in Manchester and some of the changes that many older generations of gay people, in particular, who were a part of it, were struggling to make sense of. It also constitutes a study of British culture in the first-decade of the twenty-first century and the kinds of changes affecting many people within that culture. As the study will show, there were many areas where the underlying assumptions about what it means in the late capitalist age to be a person are the same for all men and women, irrespective of whether they self-identified their sexuality as gay or straight. Central to the study is the question of what it means to define one's sexuality as heterosexual in a world in which heterosexuality has to be self-created because all the old differences upon which the categories 'gay' and 'straight' were once thought to depend have been brought into question. Having outlined the methodological approach taken to the study and provided a summary of the main findings of the research, I now turn to look at kind of city that Manchester was at the time that I carried out fieldwork there between January and December 2003. I also introduce the gay community itself as it centres both on the Village and where gay people live and work, before considering the Village in more detail, the kind of space that it was and the kind of people who used it.

2. Manchester 2003: A City of Culture

Manchester is the UK's third largest city. Its development owes much to the Industrial Revolution when it flourished as a centre for the textile industry. As the city became the world's leading manufacturer of cotton the city's red brick mills and their towering chimneys transformed Manchester into a busy commercial centre. The 'Manchester Men' of the second half of the nineteenth century made Manchester the most commercially advanced city in the world and operated outside of formal politics. The social costs of economic success soon became evident, however, as the city became one of the most overcrowded and unhealthy places to live in within the UK.

From the mid-nineteenth century while cotton remained central to the city's economy, a more diverse manufacturing base started to emerge. As Manchester became the focus of a network of industrial communications the city's commercial services expanded rapidly. Economic activity was further enhanced by the opening of a number of canals across the city. The population of Manchester increased dramatically and as housing in the city centre began to be replaced by warehouses, the process of outmigration to leafy suburbs in South Manchester began, a process which was extended by the laying down of

the railways. By 1880 a modern metropolitan city had started to emerge surrounded by cotton towns.

The first half of the twentieth century was to see major decentralisation trends. As Manchester's suburbs continued to grow the inner city started to decline. Nearly half of the city's inner city housing was defined as "slum housing" (Harrison 1981). Employment in textiles halved between the wars and exports of cotton goods fell to a fifth of their pre-World War One level. The cotton industry had declined by 1939 and a final decline of mill production was experienced by the 1950s. Manchester was, however, protected by its broad employment base and increasing manufacturing role and even by the late 1950s there was strong belief that while declining industries were likely to be phased out the city would generate more advanced manufacturing that would recreate jobs . In its heyday as the most important industrial city in the world, its population exploded as people moved away from the surrounding countryside and into the city seeking new opportunities. However, as employment disappeared from the city with the decline of its industrial base, so too did many of its residents. By the 1980s the extent of industrial decline was such that many of the city's mills and warehouses were left derelict and high levels of unemployment and social and economic deprivation ensued (Peck and Emmerich 1992, Giordano and Twomey 2002).

1. CITY GOVERNANCE

With the economic decline of the city's industries, the power of the 'Manchester Men' - the business elite - also declined and the local authority became central to the city's governance. Political power in Manchester rested with elected members of the City Council. Since the 1920s the city's labour politics had been split along two distinct lines, namely the Labour Party controlled local authority and the trade union movement. The economic decline of the city due to industrial decline during the 1960s-70s reduced the influence of the city's unions and promoted the renewal of the city's political leadership. Following the reorganisation of local government in 1974, any political radicalism within the City Council was squeezed out by the increased demands of central government service provision. The city's Labour Party therefore remained dominated by an ageing body of 'right wing' councillors. It was in this context that what are often referred to as the 'new urban left' began to mobilise from community and trade union politics into Labour Party politics. They had a rhetorical commitment to socialism. After decades of relative political inertia they took over the city's Labour Party in 1979 and came to lead the City Council in 1984 under the leadership of Graham Stringer (Quilley 1997). The city's social and economic crisis due to industrial decline effected a search for a new policy agenda.

With the rise of Margaret Thatcher's administration the City Council as led by the local Labour Party experienced a decline in morale. The decreasing of party membership combined with the ageing of party members led a group of political activists to devise a radical agenda for the local Labour Party. The 1980s marked a period of strongly socialist politics in local government generally in Britain, at least in the metropolitan areas. Stringer's administration was to express a more vigorous brand of socialism than had existed before. That the staunchly right wing Government and the City Council would ultimately collide was inevitable. The 1980 local authority budget had generated conflicts over the formulation of a strategy to respond to public sector cuts. As a consequence 13 rebel councillors were expelled from the city's Labour Party who were to fight a four year battle over spending cuts which is usually referred to as the 'Manchester Fightback' campaign. During this period they made contact with a range of community groups who were become to become the basis for the 'rainbow alliance' strategy that was to emerge in the city.

The City Council were faced with the task of enforcing public service cuts and with the prospect of dealing with the consequences of a recession in the city's economy. There was therefore a shift towards a more proactive agenda on local economic policy although under the previous 'old right' leadership within Manchester increased demands had started to be made on government for funding for economic development. The 'new urban left', however, chose to

build the alliances they had already made with local community groups and equality of opportunity became an issue of concern.

The attempt at 'municipal socialism' up to 1987 by Graham Stringer's Leadership of the City Council saw an increase in elite decision making which sought to manage the financial crisis facing the city by attempting to develop a radical agenda against Thatcherism. In line with its socialist objectives Stringer's administration sought to set up a range of support for community groups which aimed to promote cultural diversity. After the third Conservative general election victory in 1987, 'equal ops' and the structures that had been created remained but funding dropped seriously. Labour councils were faced with a choice between futile resistance or a political U-turn. The political implications of Labour's defeat were not lost on Graham Stringer. He quickly came to the conclusion that cooperation with the Tory government represented the only way forward for the Council (Holden 1999).

Over the next three years, the Stringer administration began to espouse a new entrepreneurial model of development which was to involve active cooperation with local partners in the private sector, the acceptance of a property-led regeneration strategy, cooperation with the government imposed Central Manchester Development Corporation and cooperation in competitive urban redevelopment schemes such as City Challenge, City Pride and Single

Regeneration Budget initiatives. As Ron, an official of Manchester City Council put it:

> *They saw that the only way forward, given that changes had taken place in the economy, given the nature of the local economic interests, and Labour's failure to deliver at a national level, is to try and enter what are called partnerships agreements... They didn't express it like that ... but that is what they are doing.*

Where the municipal left had sought to embrace new constituencies among disadvantaged groups in society, Stringer's emerging entrepreneurial ambitions for Manchester rested on a very different understanding of the nature of the city's economic crisis. The new approach emphasised competition between cities. Whereas the municipal socialist project foregrounded the political process, the importance of democratisation and questions of access, the new approach emphasised concrete results (Cochrane *et al* 1996). Again according to Ron:

> *There was a big change because at the start the new left was incredibly process oriented. The whole thing was about creating new channels between the people and the Labour administration, procedures, equal opportunities ...*

That seems to have been thrown out. Now it is a case of let's get things done ... so that immediately alienates voluntary organisations whose culture doesn't really fit in. Anything to do with the city has consultation of a different type which tends to be with the private sector. There is a very in difficult line in that the council spends a lot of time getting other people to pay for the things it wants to do. When it does that and people pay, you have to play by a certain number of their rules.

In effect what happened is that the Stringer accepted that he had to get the best deal for the city in terms of attracting inward investment and so began to think in terms of a package of measures which focused on the reimaging of Manchester as a major European city, a regional capital. This has allowed it to reinvent itself as a post-modern, post-industrial city.

During the 1980s the City Council's main concerns were with the city's social and economic problems. Cultural policies were therefore not seen as a priority in funding terms. Over time, however, a number of anti-municipalist approaches encouraged public-private partnership and 'de-politicisation' which came increasingly to define the objectives of the City Council in the 1990s.

It was in the early 1990s that interest in the city's cultural assets started to be developed and a major consultancy study was carried out. The study was to

assess the strengths and weaknesses of the city's cultural economy and draw up a strategy that would maximise the input of investment in culture with the broader aim of raising the profile of the city nationally and internationally. The output from this exercise was a local authority cultural strategy (1992). which aimed to develop the city's cultural heritage by promoting wider participation in cultural activity and, of course, developing opportunities for employment in the cultural industries. Local authority departments were restructured specifically to accommodate the cultural profiling of the city. The strategy attempted to balance cultural production and consumption whilst placing emphasis on wider access and participation and also aimed to integrate cultural policy with wider city regeneration policies. A review of this strategy was carried out in 1997 and a new version published in 2000 (Table 1).

Table 1 Manchester's Cultural Strategy

Arts and Cultural Heritage to ensure secure development investment in the key organisations which act as cornerstones in Manchester's cultural economy and to enable other cultural initiatives in the private as well as the voluntary sector.

Sense of Place and Urban Culture to create an environment which reflects Manchester's objective to be recognised as a European Regional

Centre, through new programmes for improved urban spaces, street life, cultural animation and public art.

Social Cohesion to break down barriers to access and encourage wider participation in arts and cultural activity; to recognise the distinctive culture of communities and diverse cultural and ethnic groups and the role that this can play in strengthening communities and neighbourhoods.

Economic Development to stimulate creativity and artistic development, affirming the role of culture in Manchester's future and taking a risk positive approach to new ideas; to increase opportunities for training and employment in the cultural industries and to recognise the contribution of the cultural sector in the regeneration of the city.

Marketing and Promotion to increase both the numbers and range of arts audiences and cultural consumers, building up new audiences for the arts among both residents and visitors; to promote the role of arts and culture in projecting a more positive image of the city.

Source: Manchester City Council (2000) An Arts and Cultural Strategy for Manchester, Manchester: MCC.

The City Council also started to promote the concept of the '24 hour city' and the contribution that the night time economy could make to the city's cultural policy which was to seriously challenge the idea of separating home, work and leisure. A number of private individuals, however, had already identified a vibrant youth culture (Taylor *et al* 1996, O'Connor and Wynne 1996, Haslam 1999). In the 1980s, for example, the creation by local entrepreneur Anthony H. Wilson of the famous nightclub, the Hacienda, helped to transform Manchester from a declining industrial city into 'Madchester', the place to be. Local bands such as Joy Division, New Order, The Smiths, Happy Mondays and the Stone Roses were also nurtured to international success by Anthony H. Wilson's associated record label, Factory Records. The Hacienda was designed to offer something different to established nightclubs. The name of the club itself came from a book that nobody had apparently ever read called 'The Situationalist International Handbook', the 'Hacienda' being an idealised collective community. The stark industrial design of the club from the British designer Ben Kelly was unlike anything that had gone before. To continue the theme of difference, below the dance floors was the Gay Traitors bar celebrating Kim Philby and Guy Burgess, the gay Brits who betrayed their country to spy for the Soviet Union. Its heyday came in the mid and late 1980s when it popularised the new dance craze 'house' which was partially fuelled by the dance drug 'ecstasy'. However, in the 1990s the mood started to change, the drug gangs moved in occupying their own areas of the club and intimidating

staff and public alike. Then in 1991 a young club goer from Stoke died from ecstasy poisoning. Soon after security staff were threatened with a machine gun and the police closed the club with the approval of a shocked management. The club opened again in 1992, but the heights were rarely reached again. The end came shortly after the fifteenth birthday celebration in the summer of 1997. Police looking into the night time economy and its negative effects were sitting in their car near the Hacienda one evening accompanied by local magistrates. As the club was closing a gang of thugs almost beat to death some innocent individual who they thought had insulted them inside the Hacienda. The club became convinced it would have its license revoked and did not have the finances to support a lengthy closure.

By the early 1990s the Village was already beginning to flourish as another aspect of the city's youth culture with the area becoming more visible to the wider straight community with the development of a bar with distinctive long windows called Manto. Converted from an old Trade Union Centre, Manto was opened in January 1991 by gay entrepreneurs, Carol Ainscow and Peter Dalton who were to kick-start what was often referred to during fieldwork as 'the Canal Street revolution'. With its long plain glass windows and minimalist looking steel façade and balcony, Manto stood out like a sore thumb amongst the ruins. In doing so the bar also underlined a gay presence in the area that, for

the very first time, the eyes of Manchester's wider straight society were invited to see.

The Village became an important economic asset for the city as well as a marketing tool to sell the city's image as a progressive, liberal city, welcoming a diverse range of people. The strategy also used a series of events to promote this new image: the Olympic bids, City of Drama, the Commonwealth Games as well as the development of other cultural quarters such as Chinatown and the Indian "Curry Mile" centred on Rusholme. The image serves to underline the move away from the city's industrial past based on production towards cultural diversity and consumption (Peck and Tickell 1995). What started out as a counter cultural movement by a group of private individuals has since been turned into a culture industry (Mellor 2002). By the time that I began my fieldwork in Manchester in 2003 the city had undergone massive transformation.

Formerly run down areas have been turned into highly visible spaces of consumption. Thousands of people have also returned to living in the city centre, often in the Victorian mills that still dominate the city's landscape today. Many of these mills have been converted into luxury residential developments, if not into high class shops, restaurants, bars or clubs which have made the city centre once again a popular place to live, work and play. In

addition to the Village, other highly visible spaces of consumption that have been created across the city include the refashioned Millennium Quarter, Deansgate Locks, Exchange Square and a range of spaces around the canals and quaysides in the city centre. Gourmet coffee bars and sandwich shops such as Starbucks, Café Nero, Coffee Republic, Pret-a-Manger and Eat are dotted all over the city centre. Flagship retail developments such as Marks and Spencer, Selfridges and Harvey Nichols which were once confined to Britain's capital have also been opened alongside a range of other high class designer clothing stores such as Louis Vuitton, DKNY, Emporio Armani and Vivienne Westwood. These high profile companies have helped to change public perceptions of the city by giving it a confident, stylish air. Such industries are also as much about 'image' and 'experience' as about the products themselves. In addition, the city relies heavily on its reputation for music, sport and creativity. In recent years the city aimed to grow this reputation by attracting government and private sector investment for the hosting of the 2002 Commonwealth Games. Investment has also been put into the setting up of new or refurbished museums such as the Lowry, the Manchester Art Gallery, the Imperial War Museum and Urbis, the Museum of Urban Life. In this way, the city has managed to shake off its image of being a wet Victorian northern city and instead is constantly represented as a 'vibrant', 'exciting' and 'cosmopolitan' place in which to be.

Recent estimates of cultural activity within the city centre have noted that in 2002 there were 350 licensed premises in the city centre and 5000 people employed in its night-time economy with £250 million being spent annually on the entertainment business. A central feature of the cultural dynamics of Manchester city centre has also been the recent boom in residential development which has resulted in the completion of over a hundred schemes, providing apartments for over 10,000 residents. While the 1991 Census identified 966 residents in Manchester city centre, subsequent local censuses established that this figure had risen to 3, 338 in 1996 and 4, 550 in 1998. Estimates based on planning applications suggest that by 2001 the number of city centre residents had risen again to 6, 149 and that by March 2003, the city centre population would reach 13, 292 (Giordamo & Twomey 2002, p. 57). This change has been closely associated with the development of urban living. The very branding of many of the city centre residential developments reflects a conscious attempt to capture and commoditise the glamour associated with more confident Euro-American cities. Note, for example, some of their names: The Edge, No. 1 Deansgate, Mercury Buildings, The Lock Building, W3, Tuscany House, Vantage Quay and Lexington 42 where I lived during fieldwork. Even the Hacienda has been turned into a residential development called Hacienda Apartments. Associated with these new residential developments are a new group of 'aesthetes' who live urban lifestyles and thus play an increasingly active role in the definition of cultural images and the

fluidity of identity associated with the city centre in general. Studies of city centre residents in Manchester such as that by Wynne and O'Connor (1998) have noted, for example, that three quarters of such residents are under 40, two thirds live alone, over half have degrees, and a substantial majority are in managerial/professional employment. Such residents are apparently enthusiastic consumers of central area facilities with interests and regular participation in theatre, gallery, film, music, bars and clubs. Social networks are also of immense interest to this group who tend to demonstrate 'leftish' politics associated with major issues rather than formal party membership. They are also clear in their choice of friends, being in favour of 'sociable', 'amusing', and 'lively' acquaintances and having relatively little time for 'refined', 'well-bred' and 'artistic' individuals. Such individuals also tended to have a relatively weak commitment to any form of work ethic and the convenience of living close to one's workplace. Their lifestyles show a fluidity and openness with regard to non-traditional forms of sociability with the city centre being seen as both an 'edge' and a 'stage' with a relatively weak commitment to traditional urban lifestyles. For many the move to the city centre – 'where it's at', 'living at the heart of things', was an attempt to 'open up and explore', taking a particular stand away from dominant perceptions of the more fixed nature of suburban lifestyles. Living in the city centre is approached in terms of a sense of play, sociability and hedonism rather than in the work hard, play hard way that was characteristic of the 1980s 'yuppie' - a term used in the 1980s during

the Margaret Thatcher administration to describe predominantly young, successful, upwardly mobile professionals with an abundance of disposable income to spend. Thus for city centre residents the process is essentially one of renegotiation of identity through the navigation of cultural diversity.

The city's cultural assets have helped the city grow and develop, bringing organisations and individuals to Manchester to live, work and play. Not only are they said to have made life more interesting and the city more liveable, but they have also made a huge economic contribution to the city's current and future economic performance. Quality of life measures are notoriously hard to quantify, but new evidence gives some indication of Manchester's position of strength. First, the UK is beginning to see Manchester developing a new status and reputation for its quality of life. Recent research by MORI, backed up by a poll of BBC radio listeners, found that a majority of people now considered Manchester to be England's second city. Second, quantitative research sponsored by DNKY tracked the different components of 'liveability' and combined it into a UK urban energy index. Looking at knowledge (GCSE pass rates, number of schools, students etc), finance (number of jobs, VAT registered companies), culture (number of theatres, cinemas, museums and galleries), retail (number, size and type of shops) and nightlife (number and quality of pubs, nightclubs and restaurants) this research ranked Manchester the UK's second most lively city after London.

2 THE VILLAGE

a) Historical emergence of the area

The Gay Village is the part of the city where gay venues, especially bars and clubs, are located. The area is in close proximity to Manchester's train and bus stations, just on the edge of the main shopping centre, next to Chinatown and very close to one of the city's universities. The Village grew up around a small number of pubs in what was once a run down warehouse district fronting the Rochdale Canal. The space was well known as the location of the city's long distance coach station (Chorlton Street) and red light district. There were no street lights and the vast majority of buildings were disused or in a poor state of repair.

The Village's main street - Canal Street – is now a completely regenerated area fronting the Rochdale Canal. It is surrounded by large Victorian red brick warehouse conversions which have been subject to considerable upgrading so that the area is now variously described as 'ever-throbbing, 'never-sleeping' and as 'the birthplace of Manchester's brilliant outdoor café-bar scene'. The area is predominantly represented as gay male as is also evidenced by the vandalism that continually erases the 'C' and the 'S' from Canal Street so that it reads 'Anal Treet'. The area does now have one lesbian bar 'Vanilla'. The area is brightly lit,

there are some offices housing 'new' media and PR companies and the surrounding streets have been developed with expensive residential developments.

With the exception of the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, all of the city's spaces that could broadly be described as 'gay', especially bars and clubs, have come to be concentrated here. At the beginning of fieldwork there were 24 bars and 3 clubs. Some of these subsequently closed and new bars opened in their place which meant that the community continually had an air of transience about it. In addition, to bars and clubs, there were also a small number of other businesses including a sauna, sex shop, grocers, two hairstylists, solicitors, doctors and several takeaways. Gay households on the other hand were more scattered. Although the conversion of a number of warehouses into luxury loft style apartments in recent years has added a residential dimension to the area, the Village was not primarily a living space. Most gay men and women just like their straight counterparts lived all over Manchester and beyond. In addition to the Village area itself, however, there were concentrations of gay people in the Hulme regeneration area and Chorlton-cum-Hardy areas of the city and in certain parts of nearby Salford.

The development of the Village as a gay space owed everything to the fact that as home to the Campaign for Homosexual Equality Manchester had one of the

largest gay liberation movements in Britain. In the 1950s and 1960s the social lives of gay men were relatively invisible, but there were a number of places in Manchester where gay men used to meet. There were two cruising areas in Manchester city centre – areas where men would meet other men for sex - located on Bridgewater Street and Knott Mill. Gay men also used to meet in coteries – the end of a bar in a pub that officially catered to an heterosexual clientele. In 1965, the licensee of the Union was imprisoned for "outraging public decency" by running a pub in which gay men were welcome (Taylor *et al* 1996, p.183, Whittle 1994, p. 32). The relative invisibility of gay men's lives during the 1950s and 60s was also reflected in the "pregay" homosexual identity of the political campaign which led to the passing of the Sexual Offences Act. The 1960s law reform activism avoided presenting itself as a campaign as such by instead presenting homosexuals as victims who needed understanding rather than criminalisation (Quilley 1997, p.277).

Following the law reforms the first openly gay venues were situated near the main cruising areas. A club called Rouge, for example, which later became the Queen's Club opened near Knott Mill and was followed by the Rockingham on Brazenose Street and later Slingsby's Bar and Heroes Club on Wood Street. While something of a commercial gay bar and club scene started to emerge, apart from the Rembrandt and the Union it was situated some distance from where the Village is now between Albert Square and Deansgate. Deansgate did

not remain the main centre for gay people in Manchester for very long. The centre shifted when Samantha's opened on Back Piccadilly in 1970. It moved a couple of years later to George Street where as Samantha's II it was very near to what is now known as the Village. At around the same time in 1972 Napoleons 21 Club opened. Now called only Napoleon's and situated in the heart of the Village it is the longest existing gay club in Manchester. When James Anderton was head of the Greater Manchester Police between 1975 and 1991 he famously declared gay people to be "swirling around in a cesspit of their own making" and was to implement a policy which would lead to a clampdown on gay venues. Napoleon's, with its "men only" door policy, found itself at the centre of police harassment during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1978 the police raided the club under a 19th century by-law for "licentious dancing" because men could be seen dancing together. In 1984 over twenty policeman again raided the club and customers were asked to provide their names and address. In a scene similar, however, to that of the Stonewall riots, about 20 transvestites were in the club and refused to move. Although the police did eventually manage to close the club the protest brought the gay liberationist movement within the city into an alliance against the police (Whittle 1994, p. 35).

At the same time as the Village became the centre for gay activism following the second raid on Napoleon's, the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was also leading an ideological offensive to reinstate a particular idea of 'family

values'. This highly visible campaign was turned towards criticism of the gay community, especially when the first reports began to emerge of the HIV virus and subsequent deaths from AIDS in America. Anti-gay feeling was also whipped up by the popular press and the gay community faced overtly political attacks. For example, Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) prohibited the promotion of gay sexuality by local authorities. The struggle against this legislation helped to forge a collective sense of community among many gay people throughout the country and Manchester was chosen as the national centre for demonstrations against Clause 28. According to Ian Taylor *et al* (1996) many gay people talked of this time as one of withdrawal into the community and this general feeling may have contributed to the development of a gay space separate from other areas of the city where homophobic encounters or even assaults were feared. Given the cheap rents and property prices in the area now known as the Village, a clear market opportunity also existed for gay entrepreneurs to take part in the process of gentrification of the city centre, but within a distinct territory. The Village area close to Chorlton Street coach station and the established locale for prostitution, was not immediately recognised as ripe for development by the mainstream agencies: in fact recognition of its full potential was delayed until the establishment of the Central Manchester Development Corporation in 1988 (Taylor 1996, p.184). However, despite the success of gay activists even by the early 1980s a transition had not been made from institutionalised sociability to

institutionalised visibility. According to Barbara Weightman even during the 1980s from the point of view of a wider straight community, a gay bar "carried few clues declaring its nature" and was characterised by location in marginal areas such as red light districts, inconspicuous, often windowless images which restricted access through the use of internal partitions, notices and messages (Weightman in Quilley 1997, p.278).

b) Incorporation of gay activism into local government politics

The Village was produced not just by gay activists but also by the incorporation of this activism into local government politics and later a culture-led regeneration strategy which depended on highly visible spaces of consumption. The transformation of the Labour administration under Graham Stringer in 1987, had a particular impact on the gay community. The influence of that period was still felt during my time in Manchester as the use of the Village by straight men and women was an effect of the City Council's switch to a more commercial policy towards the area which involved stimulating business. A dispute which broke out between bar owners which I shall recount below was in part an effect of this policy and ultimately led many Village users to reassess the meaning of gay identity which appeared increasingly to centre on a commoditised form of gay sexuality.

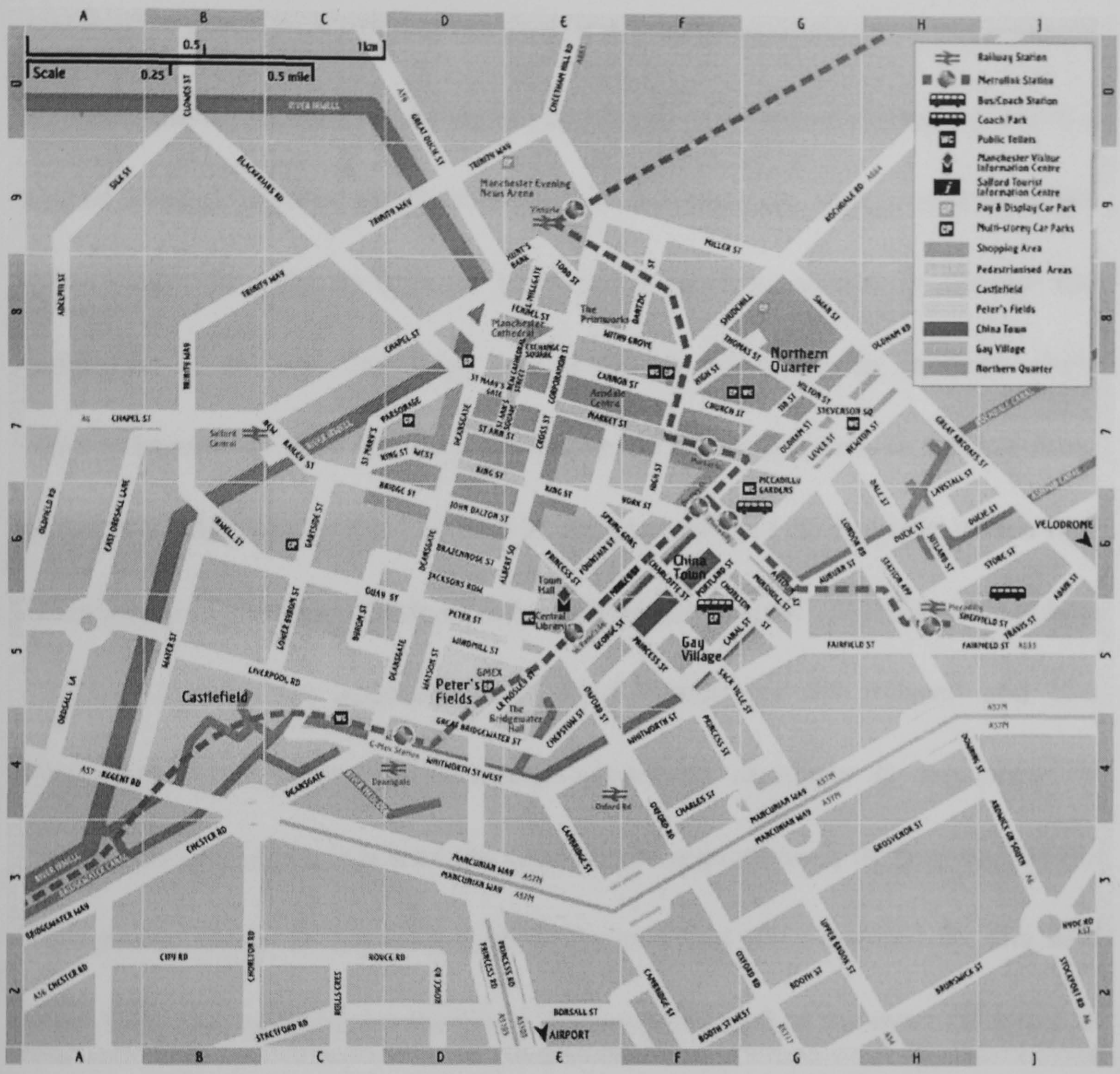

Figure 2 A map highlighting where the Village is located in relation to the rest of Manchester city centre

Stringer wanted to counter discrimination against gay people and bring down the Thatcher government. The aim was therefore to encourage the gay community to recognise that at the root of the oppression that they experienced was Thatcherite capitalism. As such, gay people were seen as natural allies in a shared struggle against the central state. In this struggle, gay people who had either never or only marginally been funded before, suddenly became the recipients of money, buildings and publicity in order to facilitate their empowerment. In 1983 the Gay Centre on Bloom Street, one of twenty-three projects funded under the Urban Aid programme had its funding which had been cut by 25 per cent restored back to its previous level[3]. The Gay Sweatshop Theatre Group were approached to do a benefit for the miners[4] and The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament advertised regularly in the pages of *Mancunian Gay*. Also, whereas the Gay Centre was allowed its first stall at the Manchester Show in September 1984, the military were banned for the first time. Increased funding for the Gay Centre culminated in the eventful move to new premises on Sydney Street. Throughout the period the local gay press also benefited and was to some extent sustained by advertising revenues from the City Council (Quilley 1997 p. 283).

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[3] *Mancunian Gay* 35 (1984): 13.

[4] Minutes of the Gay Men's Sub-Committee, February 21 1985. Minutes of this Sub-Committee are on file in the Archive of Manchester City Council in the town hall.

c) The emergence of identity politics

Stringer's administration created an opportunity for gay activists to push their own agenda which saw a renewed interest in affirming gay identity, developing political alliances and working within the state (Cooper 1994, p.23).

The council's approach to identity politics was through its Equal Opportunities Policy. The use of this policy, however, had the unintentional effect of not recognising the different experiences of gay men and lesbian women in Manchester. A Gay Men's Subcommittee was formed to represent the interests of gay men who were able to relate to the male dominated structure of local government and with a number of openly gay councillors. Gay activists also increasingly became involved in the city Labour Party, in the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO) and in the work of the Council either as employees or members. For lesbian activists though, the relationship with the City Council was always more problematic. Many of the initial meetings were taken up with issues raised by this relationship and addressed questions such as whether to hold meetings at City Council offices (Quilley 1997, p. 282).

The new political influence of gay activists further enabled the gay community to start defending itself against raids on gay bars and clubs that were carried out

by the Greater Manchester Police. It was not until 1992 that Anderton's replacement, David Wilmot, was willing to issue a statement relating to the need for equal opportunities for lesbian and gay police officers. In 1985 the Chief Planning Officer and the Equal Opportunities Committee rejected the suggestion that there was a need for research and general information on lesbian and gay communities in Manchester – a point of view contested by the Gay Men's Sub-Committee[5]. By 1990 after pressure from the community led to the rejection of an application for a multi story car park on Bloom Street, the Highways and Planning Committee agreed that the community should be consulted on all further planning applications. At the same time, the Sub-Committee was putting forward proposals for public notice boards in the Bloom Street area showing details and locations of facilities in the area. This was less about information than the desire for public recognition of the area as home to the gay community by the City Council. It is perhaps worth quoting from a City Council publication of that date. 'The City Council wishes to work with the Gay and Lesbian communities on the proposals to further the development of the Gay Village around Bloom Street in the City Centre. If the outcome of this process leads to any significant changes in this area, they will dealt with in an early amendment to the Plan'.[6] It was the first time that the area as a whole had

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[5] Gay Men's Sub-Committee minutes, October 1985, Manchester. Minutes of this Sub-Committee are on file in the Archive of Manchester City Council in the town hall

[6] September 1991 *City Planning News No.* 2 (A free broadsheet publication, distributed by the City Council as part of a public participation exercise)

been claimed as a gay space. The increasing confidence of the community can be seen also in deliberations about the possible new gay centre which stressed the need for visibility. However, whilst political pressure and influence in the Labour Party certainly made a difference, the final 1991 conversion of council officers to the idea of a Gay Village as a unitary entity significant in planning terms was due more to the recognition of the area's economic importance in marketing the city. Whilst the first reference to the idea of a Village was in 1984, it is worth noting that it was not until three years after the imposition of the Central Manchester Development Corporation in 1991 that *City Planning News* referred to the Gay Village as a planning entity.

d) The emergence of lifestyle politics

In line with this shift away from oppositional politics, the structures that had served the alliance of politics of resistance were wound down. By 1992 the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) with its separate gay and lesbian subcommittees had been submerged into the Policy and Resources Subcommittee. Instead of a formal structure involving members of the community there was an open invitation to raise issues informally with lead members of the Labour Council such as Pat Karney (Quilley 1997, p. 286). However, the dissipation of the municipal lesbian and gay project was not only due to the defeat of the left and the adoption of a radically different political

strategy. After 1998 the wider movement was also subjected to a process of demobilisation. James Anderton was replaced by a much more gay friendly Chief Constable in 1991; Section 28 was passed into law and it was recognised that little could be done to alter this. For reasons that are not as clear, HIV and AIDS ceased to be as much a campaigning issue. Corton (1993) quotes Chris Payne's summary of the typical gay man's view of the issues that once ignited the village:

> ... the City Council's no problem, the police could always be better, but they're not so bad as other cities; we've got pubs and clubs; it's safe, what do I need to campaign for? (1993, p. 56)

As a consequence of the developments, in July 1990, the Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action established in the aftermath of Section 28 had been wound down due to a lack of interest. The Equal Opportunities Framework which aimed to treat all gay relations equally could not address difficult issues and struggles within the community over such issues as gender, class, race and age (Cooper 1994, p. 179). For example, one of the reasons for the widening gap between lesbian and gay activists was the alternative focus for gay men offered by the commercial bar and club scene. Political involvement was no longer fashionable and in this context institutional links with the City Council seemed increasingly irrelevant. The Village by contrast flourished, in part reflecting the

fact that gay identity could now be more comfortably expressed through the commercial bar and club scene. Gay lifestyles also fitted well with the city's property-led regeneration strategy that was followed by Stringer's administration.

e) The disagreement over what constitutes a gay bar

Although the city council subsequently accepted the need to work with business in the regeneration of the city centre and formal institutional links with gay activists were eroded, it never abandoned its earlier commitment to gay rights. Later with a more commercial emphasis to policy, this commitment took the form of stimulating business in the area which was to become known as the Gay Village. But, business has its own agenda which does not necessarily coincide with the interests of gay men and lesbians. The Village ceased to centre around political activity and became a centre of hedonism and in this users were aided by a growing number of new businesses which were established in the area. While consumerism in a capitalist society may be a way in which collaboration can be gained by the state, the effect of this has been to transform the character of the Village. In one sense the use of the Village by straight people has destroyed something which many gay people felt they had made their own.

A mini-commercial boom in the Village in the mid 1990s resulted in a number of newer bars opening (some by national chains). This caused tensions between the gay community and bar owners over what exactly constituted a gay bar. The bars that started to emerge in the area looked very different to anything that had gone before and started to more substantially change the overall image of the area, thus also bringing its overall purpose into question. At the same time users of the Village were starting to reassess their own identities. The significance of this will become clearer as the disagreement between bar owners which was summarised in an article called *Going Straight?* wh ich appeared in *City Life* magazine on 8 May 1996, is recounted below.

The disagreement started in 1996 with the opening of Prague Five, a bar owned by Bass brewery. This led Peter Dalton, the owner of Manto, to put up posters and distribute leaflets declaring that Manto was 'gay owned and gay-run for gay people'. This was done out of concern that brewery owned bars like Prague Five were motivated not by serving the interests of gay people, but primarily by profiting from the gay community. At the time not all bar owners were convinced that Peter Dalton's own concerns were entirely genuine. Lucy Scher, the promoter of the highly successful gay club night called *Flesh* at the now defunct Hacienda responded by saying that:

> 'ownership is irrelevant to most people, putting out leaflets is pretty transparent, a plea for loyalty on a basis that is not borne out by the rest of his business interests, it's just borne out of losing profits'.

This resulted in tensions between bar owners over what exactly the purpose of the area was but like Lucy Scher, Alistair Birdsell, the manager of Prague Five found Peter Dalton's service ethos disingenuous when the latter claimed that "no bars in the village are a charity, nobody can say they've opened to provide a service". Alan Owen, the manager of the bar Via Fossa also claimed that:

> certain bars have been known to be the bar of the Gay Village and there's quite a bit of bitchiness if places are doing better than others.

In the mid 1990s when these disagreements between bar owners and managers took place concerns were not only being waged by gay people about the opening of brewery owned bars, but also about the fact that they were bringing in to the Village increasingly large numbers of straight men and women. This was thought to be particularly problematic in the sense that because many of these bars were well known high street names, they attracted an undesirable straight element to the area. There was also much concern that straight men having latched on to the idea that straight women were using the area to evade them, in fact started to follow them in to Village bars and clubs and thus there

was mounting concern about homophobic violence (Moran *et al* 2003, p. 87). However, not all bar owners and managers expressed concerns. Ian Scott, the owner of Metz, another bar in the Village was reported as having said that his bar was:

> 'for everybody, anyone can come as long as they are decent and courteous. Metz has a more disparate clientele than any other venue'.

Moreover, he claimed that his door policy was not aimed at excluding straight men and women, instead the bouncers, who were also both gay and straight, were simply expected to keep the rowdier element out. At the time Scott said that the area is now seen as representing the 'new Manchester' and far from feeling threatened by the development of other bars he said that 'they're all bringing some point of difference to the area'.

Other bars, like Via Fossa owned by Scottish and Newcastle brewery, also enforced the door policy 'predominantly gay with friends of gay people'. However, the fact that many of the bars like Via Fosssa did nothing to alleviate the problem since there was still the issue of how exactly a bar was able to decide who is and who is not gay. Lucy Scher, for example, was reported as having said that:

'Most of the bouncers on Canal Street are straight and decisions made are often somewhat curious, not to mention inconsistent; people getting turned away the night after they were let in'.

This is something that Alan Owen, the owner of Via Fossa, admitted when he said 'we have had problems from people both gay and straight but I believe these problems have been ironed out'. Meanwhile Peter Dalton maintained that straight owned business in the Village found it difficult to relate to what gay people want and especially to specific issues like safety. He therefore continued to contend that:

'Unless you've been on the receiving end you can't appreciate it. I find it a little bit ruthless and cynical the attitude that the gay scene's got lot's of money – we'll have some of that without really giving a damn about what goes with it'.

In the mid 1990s both Via Fossa and Prague Five had gay managers and claimed that they went some lengths to ensure the safety of their customers with. As Tom Machin of Scottish and Newcastle brewery pointed out:

'When we took over from Boddingtons we knew we were taking on a bar in a gay area and that the clientele would be mainly gay, but we

don't want to send out a message that straight people aren't welcome'.

Similarly Pat Horton and Mark Cain, the owners of a New York style lounge bar in the Village called Velvet which opened in 1998 claimed that:

'Velvet aims to attract a wide range of people, a lot of who are gay ... I wouldn't turn somebody away because they were straight, but I don't want any voyeurs. Velvet is meant to be sophisticated and subdued. We don't go for a pre-club crowd like Manto'.

However, many of the gay people that used the Village felt that these door policies were confusing, especially as Velvet was accused of turning away a group of gay people because they were ugly, the group being the University Lesbian and Gay Society. While Mark Cain admitted the area was becoming less gay, he did not believe that this was solely attributable to bars like Velvet:

'It's churlish to attack the newer bars when other venues opened their doors to a wider cross-section a long-time ago. Manto is less gay than it ever was. Other venues because they are going for a young, fashion conscious, switched on crowd are, by their very nature, mixed ... gay people increasingly want to drink with people who aren't gay. And

then what do you do about those people when they're not with their gay friends? It has to be mixed. It's not so much who owns the bars, it's how they're fronted. All my staff are gay. I have a gay doorman. Velvet is imagined to be gay friendly. It's different when you look at brewery owned sites because they have a corporate image to think about'.

Similarly, Alastair Birdsell, the manager of Prague Five also disputed that brewery owned bars were a problem:

> 'Prague was set up to be a gay-orientated venue. We do what we can to attract a gay clientele – through marketing and events and the magazines we keep. But we welcome straight people and a lot come to Canal Street now because they like the ambience. Canal Street still has a strongly gay focus. It's competition isn't it'.

However, even Mark Cain complained to the Council about the opening of Prague Five:

> 'We were very concerned about Prague opening and we objected on the basis of what they might attract. Alastair knows the area and he's attracting generally good people, but with these places you are at the

mercy of whoever owns it. They could change the managers to someone who just wants to get the money in the tills'.

f) Television dramas

Towards the end of the 1990s the Village was brought to the attention of local, national and international audiences through the filming and screening of two television dramas 'Queer as Folk' (1999) and 'Bob and Rose' (2001).

'Queer as Folk' is a story about Stuart, Vince and Nathan who are three very different gay men. Stuart is a hard, arrogant, successful businessmen who lives a life of hedonism. When in the Village he is constantly on the look out for sex and even tape records himself having sex so that he can watch the recording afterwards. He cares about nobody but himself in contrast to Vince who is caring and sensitive and whose sexual encounters work to comic effect. One night, for example, he takes home from the Village what he thinks is a 'Muscle Mary', a term used to describe a very well built muscular gay man, only to find that he is concealing a flabby belly by wearing a girdle. Another time he also takes home a man who has Brazillian bugs in his bum. Completely different again is 15 year old schoolboy, Nathan, who makes the mistake of 'coming out' by having under age sex with Stuart. In 'Queer as Folk' the Village is portrayed as a space that allows all of the characters to create themselves. It is a space that

allows Nathan to find his sexuality and be free from homophobic bullying at school, that frees his best friend Donna, a straight girl from school from abuse at home, Stuart from a homophobic family and Vince from work. The area is often contrasted with heterosexual space which is portrayed as more limiting. Take for example the time when Vince is about to meet Nadine, a straight woman from work and he calls Stuart on his mobile phone and says 'I'm going in, I'm going in – straight pub. Everything that we have always been told is true. There are people having conversation with no punch line and toilets in which nobody has ever had sex'[7].

'Bob and Rose' expands the view of the Village presented in 'Queer as Folk'. It is a story about Bob, a gay school teacher in his early thirties who on his way home from the Village one evening by chance bumps into thirty year old Rose who is a bit bored with her life. It is then only a matter of time before something more than friendship starts to develop yet Bob is so committed to his sexuality as a gay man that he won't even let Rose describe him as 'bisexual'. Rose's world as it centres on Deansgate, the office where she works and living at home with her mum is continually contrasted with that of Bob's as it centres on the Village where men are portrayed as better looking, more style conscious and generally up for a good time. Bob's best friend from work, Holly, who is a straight woman, is so obsessed with him and the Village where she is a regular

[7] For a fuller discussion of 'Queer as Folk' see Skeggs *et al* (2004).

that she even tries to split Bob and Rose up. Initially even Bob's mum is disappointed with the news that he has a girlfriend when he comes out to his parents "in reverse" as Rose puts it. The debate over what constituted a gay bar and the two television dramas were key moments in that they exposed changes in approach within the Village in the sense that gay identity started to be presented to straight men and women as a desirable lifestyle choice.

g) The Village's place in the city

The Village is constantly presented as glamorous by the City Council. One advertisement on the city's Tourist Information website reads:

'Night time is the right time in the Village. A whole host of cafés, bars, restaurants and night-clubs will entice the die-hards to party all night along Manchester's legendary Canal Street; drawing a cross section of people where taste, style and choice are as individual as the people who come down town to the Village'[8].

The Village can look the part too. Again, note the names of many of the newer bars that have opened in the area such as Tribeca, Prague Five and the addition to Manto of a new third floor roof gardened restaurant named after the

[8] Manchester City Council Visitor Information, http://www.manchester.gov.uk/visitorcentre/areas

Californian architecture school Sarasota. Such glamour is also reflected in the style of many of the newer bars like, for example, Eden to get to which you have to cross a bridge which then has a restaurant on the canal. Events like Europride which I shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter also provided a link between the Village and the wider context in which it existed. As the event's co-ordinator, Carol, a lesbian woman in her mid-thirties, explained:

> *Europride is held in a different European city each year. [...] Manchester hosted it because it's trying to establish itself as an international city and so this event was a way of showing the international community that Manchester is capable of attracting visitors from all over the world. [...] A lot of people think it was just about sexuality and peoples' perceptions of what it means to be gay, but it was also about Manchester as well, about it being a great city that's diverse, as you saw in the parade. Marketing Manchester have been doing gay and lesbian campaigns for about the last three years and won an award from the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Agency to market the city as the gay gateway to the UK so that gay and lesbian people see it as the most gay friendly city from which you can get to everywhere else easily. Europride feeds into all that... Gay people have arrived way beyond their sexuality.*

As far as Carol is concerned, the Village is an integral part of Manchester as a vibrant, exciting, cosmopolitan city. She clearly sees the Village as something that feeds in to the city's attempts to market itself as a tolerant, progressive European city, hence her comment that it is the 'the gay gateway to the UK' and that 'gay people have arrived way beyond their sexuality'.

3) HOUSING

The Village has become central to the marketing vision of Manchester as a lively 24-hour city in which all the usual breakpoints between home lives, work lives and leisure activities become synthesised into one. However, for the vast majority of the city's residents, important separations continued to exist between these three spheres as did the strong public/private divide between them that is characteristic of British society generally. In this respect gay people were no exception who lived and worked, if they did not also spend their free time, all over Manchester and beyond. This is an important point because the Village was not structured so that it continually separated gay people from the rest of straight society. Rather, for most gay people it was a leisure space which they, like straight users of the area, had to continually cross into.

It is impossible to estimate with any degree of accuracy how many gay people live in Manchester because there is no census data in which the term 'gay' appears, but gay people lived in a wide range of accommodation and while some did live in the Village itself, most did not. House prices in Manchester, as in the rest of Britain, at the time of fieldwork, were high and buying or renting property in the Village was not an option for the vast majority of gay people. Manchester city centre as a whole was also the most expensive area in the city in which to live. In keeping with the continuing increase in one-person households in British society generally, many younger gay people especially, lived alone. The rise of one person households is usually cited as evidence of the declining importance of kinship (e.g. McRae, 1999) as more and more people in one person households develop new single lifestyles that were virtually unknown in previous decades. In any event, many young gay and straight people that I met said that they struggled to get a foot on the property ladder. Many of the people I knew that lived in the fashionable residential developments in the Village and the rest of city centre had moved to Manchester from other parts of Britain having heard that Manchester was 'where it was at'. Very often they had often sold properties elsewhere, especially in London, where property prices are even higher again, in order to move here. For most gay people the fact that the Village existed, also played an important part in their decision to move here.

Louise, Dean and James were in their early thirties and had each made money on the sale of their homes in outer London by moving to Manchester, which they said they done for a better of quality of life. They each owned two bedroom apartments here which they lived in by themselves and would constantly show me and others that they came to know around them. One evening whilst out in the Village I was taken aback when on running into James, the first question that he asked me, was not how I was but rather how my apartment was. Many people associated city centre living with high status and single, more interesting lifestyles which is why it tended to be attractive to young 'aesthetes'. Michael, on the other hand, was in his early thirties and had lived at home with his parents and older brother all his life. He was 'out' to his family who he said were fine with his sexuality, but that he did not really talk to them much about it. He said that he was content living at home but that even if he wanted to move into a place of his own because his salary was low he would not be able to afford very much. The same could not be said for John, also in his early thirties and living with his parents at home whom he said suspected that he might be gay, but that he was still very much in the closet to them. He was considering privately renting a place of his own but the prospect of living by himself was a big step for him. Again because his income was low he also feared that he would not be able to afford decent accommodation. Table 2 shows the location and type of accommodation that my 70 'gay' co-conversationalists interviewed lived in as well as their living arrangements.

Table 2 Gay households

Location, Type and Living Arrangements	$n = 70$
Within Village	5
Within city	46
Within conurbation	17
Elsewhere	2
Owned	27
Privately rented	41
Council housing	1
Housing association	1
Living alone	42
Living with partner	2
Living with parents	8
Share house with others	18

Source: Interview data

Most of my co-conversationalists lived in private accommodation that they either privately rented or had bought further out in the suburbs of Manchester. Mark, Alison and Paul, all in their early thirties, lived by themselves in one bedroom flats that they rented in suburbs to the north, south and west of the city respectively. These were predominantly straight residential areas. The vast majority of people tended to live by themselves although house shares were also common between students and young professionals. Alice and Jason, for example, who were both postgraduate students in their early twenties, lived in a mixed gay/straight house share to the south of the city which they said was good fun as they all got along well and often went out together in the evenings. Luke, a barrister in his early twenties, also lived in a mixed gay/straight house share with other male and female professionals to the west of the city but the household later broke up and he moved into an apartment in the city centre by himself. Only one of my co-conversationalists lived in council housing which seemed to have become a thing of the past given that no new council housing was being built. One of my co-conversationalists also lived in accommodation owned by a housing association.

4) EMPLOYMENT

For most gay people, paid work existed outside of the Village. Many were pursing professional careers within the public or private sector and an

increasing number worked on a self-employed basis running their own business. Many had high educational qualifications, in fact 31 of the 70 gay people interviewed had a degree or higher qualifications, 34 had professional vocational qualifications and a further 12 were studying for first or higher degrees at one of the city's universities. This was not an unexpected finding since Manchester is the largest student city in western Europe with three universities, a large business and music school and several other higher education institutions. Many gay people also choose to study here because they know that it has a relatively large gay population. For that same reason, many often stay on in the city upon completion of their degrees as well. An equally large number of gay people, however, also worked relatively low paid jobs, for example, in shops and in call centres which again was to be expected. Since the decline of the city's heavy industry much of the local economy was very much based on the service sector. I did not personally meet or interview anyone who was unemployed, but then this was a time of low unemployment in Britain generally. Table 3 gives a breakdown of the type of employment that my 70 gay co-conversationalists interviewed were engaged in.

Table 3 Employment in which gay people were engaged

Employment Type	*n* = 70
Banking, finance, insurance	6
Consulting	5
Law	2
IT	9
Construction	1
Service Sector	16
Medicine	3
Central and local government	4
Social Services	2
Voluntary Sector Organisation	1
Teaching	2
Self-employed	6
Gay business	1
Student	12
Unemployed	0

Source: Interview data

Gay people, having fewer family commitments are often perceived to have higher disposable incomes which are sometimes referred to as 'the pink pound'. I did not collect information on earnings as people generally regarded such details as private. However, judging from newspaper advertisements specifying salaries, 24 were likely to earn more than £25,000 per annum while the rest probably earned a lot less than £20,000. In Manchester in the first decade of the twenty-first century, increasing numbers of people were remaining single or not living with their partners. And the average price of buying a home was £98, 645[9] with mortgage lenders typically willing to lend three times a person's income, the actual reality is that few people would have been well off and many on a tight budget. The average price of a home was five times more than the average main income of the average first time buyer. Rents were equally high which may explain why many people gained additional spending power by using credit cards.

There were, however, exceptions like Miles, a gay man in his early twenties who lived by himself in a two bedroom apartment in the Village having moved to Manchester from his hometown of Sheffield, to be nearer 'a more vibrant gay scene'. He said his job had enabled him to relocate to Manchester and that the money that he had made on the sale of his first home, which having not been to university he had taken a mortgage on when he got his first job at just eighteen,

[9] HM Land Registry, http://www.landreg.gov.uk/property

had allowed him to put down a substantial deposit on his flat in the Village which he had bought for £175,000. Miles, was exceptionally young to own his own home, let alone one of the luxury apartments in the Village, but speculation was beginning to mount amongst many of the people that I met about the merits, for example, of studying for a degree at university. At the time of fieldwork 43 per cent of 18-30 year olds in Britain attained a university degree and central government had a target in place to increase that number to 50 per cent by 2010. Many gay people that I met now wondered whether a university education for which they were likely to incur substantial debt, estimated to be around £12,000 – 20,000 on average, was still worthwhile. Many young graduates had jobs that did not require a university degree and that were not particularly well paid. As already mentioned, at the time of fieldwork stories were also constantly circulating in the media about the rise of a new breed of middle class plumbers and electricians who were able to earn much more money than they would have had done had they pursued a university education. Lucy, for example, was a single white woman in her early twenties who had recently graduated from university and not only was she still living at home with her parents, she also earned £10, 000 per annum less than Miles and was just one year younger than he was. What is more, this was not because she lacked motivation and ambition. In short, class, certainly where it concerned monetary wealth and the ability to afford a good lifestyle, like sexuality, now seemed far less self-evident.

Of the 70 gay people interviewed, 62 were openly gay at work. This is a high number considering that among gay people in general, one of the last places that their sexuality is revealed is at work or to family members. Often gay people never reveal their sexuality at work as it is seen as an area where they are likely to experience discrimination. Many of the gay people that I spoke to said that their employers had equal opportunities policies in place that stated that they did not discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation at work. Nonetheless 3 people said that they had experienced some form of harassment because of their sexuality at work. This ranged from occasional name calling to one of my co-conversationalists feeling that he had been fired from his job because of his sexuality. Having given an overview of the kind of city that Manchester now is, of the Village area and of where gay people lived and worked, I will now look at the Village itself in more detail and at the kind of space that it was.

3. Village People

If the Village existed through flows of images as a single community, in practice, people saw the area in a multitude of different ways depending on how they experienced and perceived the categories 'gay' and 'straight'. As a place, the Village was marked by both the different forms of economic investment that had been put into it by the owners of bars and clubs as well as by the ways in which it was used. Venue styles varied greatly. Differences between people's experiences and perceptions of being gay and being straight therefore expressed themselves in spatial terms as users of the area frequented some venues and deliberately avoided others. These kinds of differences had the effect of transforming the Village into a range of very different kinds of spaces which disrupted any potential for a single gay community.

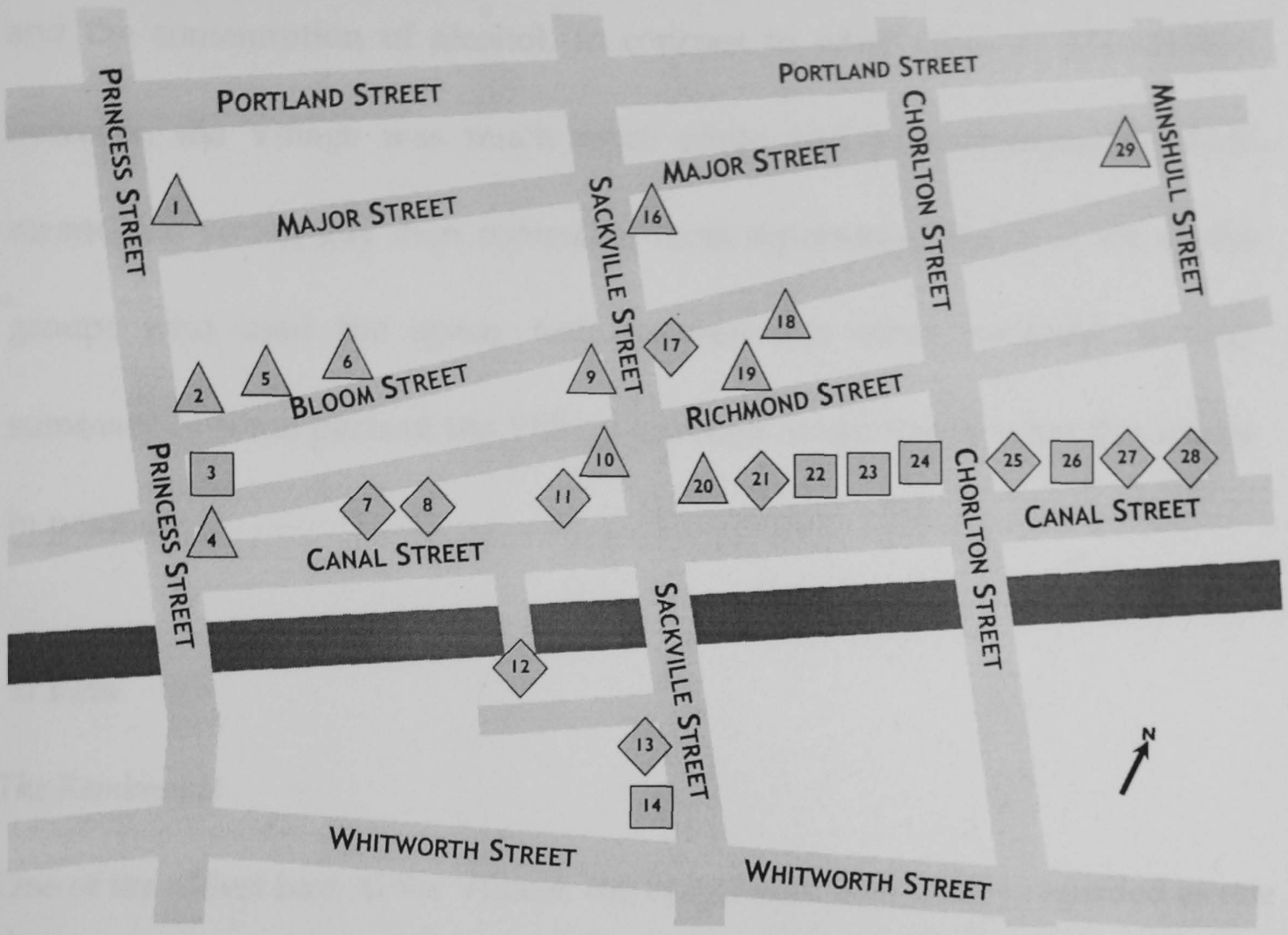
In this chapter I explore people's perceptions of what it means to be gay and to be straight, their experience of the two categories and how their understandings of them influences the way that they use the Village. The first section is mostly about different representations of gay identity in the area and focuses on groups, some of the venues that they used, events that they took part in and the different styles associated with them. I then examine the explanations that people gave for using the area, many of which subjected previous assumptions

about the coherence of gay identity and community, as informed by the gay liberationist approach to sexuality, to debate.

1. VENUES AND EVENTS

The Village was distinguished from other spaces in Manchester by its relatively gay character and provided venues where both gay and straight people imagined themselves to be temporarily free from the conventions of straight society. However, although in this sense the Village was 'gay space', owing to the fact that straight men and women used the area certain bars came to be seen by both their owners or managers and by Village users as attracting a more 'gay', 'mixed' or 'straight' clientele than others, which broadly speaking was also the case. Figure 3 outlines what different venues in the area symbolised from the perspective of Village users that I spent time with during my fieldwork.

Given the differences between venues many straight users of the area felt as much a part of the Village as any gay person there and in many respects the Village had similar characteristics to other bar and club 'scenes' in Manchester. It was predominantly young, dress styles were important, people most often went with friends outside working hours and it usually involved loud music



Key to Venues

Predominately gay venues

- 1 Cruz 101
- 2 Poptastic
- 4 New Union
- 5 Hollywood Showbar
- 6 New York New York
- 9 Napoleons
- 10 Vanilla
- 16 Thompsons
- 18 Paddy's Goose
- 19 Company
- 20 Rembrandt
- 29 Essential

Predominately mixed venues

- 7 Spirit
- 8 46 Canal Street
- 11 Bar Below
- 12 Eden
- 13 Gaia
- 21 Via Fossa
- 25 Churchill's
- 27 Velvet
- 28 Taurus

Predominately straight venues

- 3 Bar Med
- 14 Tribeca
- 22 Bar 38
- 23 Prague Five
- 24 Risa
- 26 Slug and Lettuce

Figure 3 A map of the Village highlighting conceptual differences between venues in terms of whether they were perceived by Village users to be 'gay', 'mixed' or 'straight'.

and the consumption of alcohol. In contrast to other areas in Manchester, however, the Village was much more white and male dominated which meant that young gay men controlled most representations of it. Of all the groups who used the space, lesbians were the most marginal. A brief summary of some parts of the Village provides an outline of what this meant in practice.

a) Bars

The Rembrandt

One of the oldest bars in the Village, the Rembrandt was widely regarded as one of the most gay and, as such, attracted very few straight users. Set over two floors with a main bar on the ground floor and a smaller bar upstairs that was usually referred to as 'the conservatory', this bar's clientele were mainly gay men over 30. On rare occasion when women did enter the Rembrandt, men would look on disapprovingly and it was usually only a matter of time before they were told either that they could only sit out of view upstairs or else asked to leave.

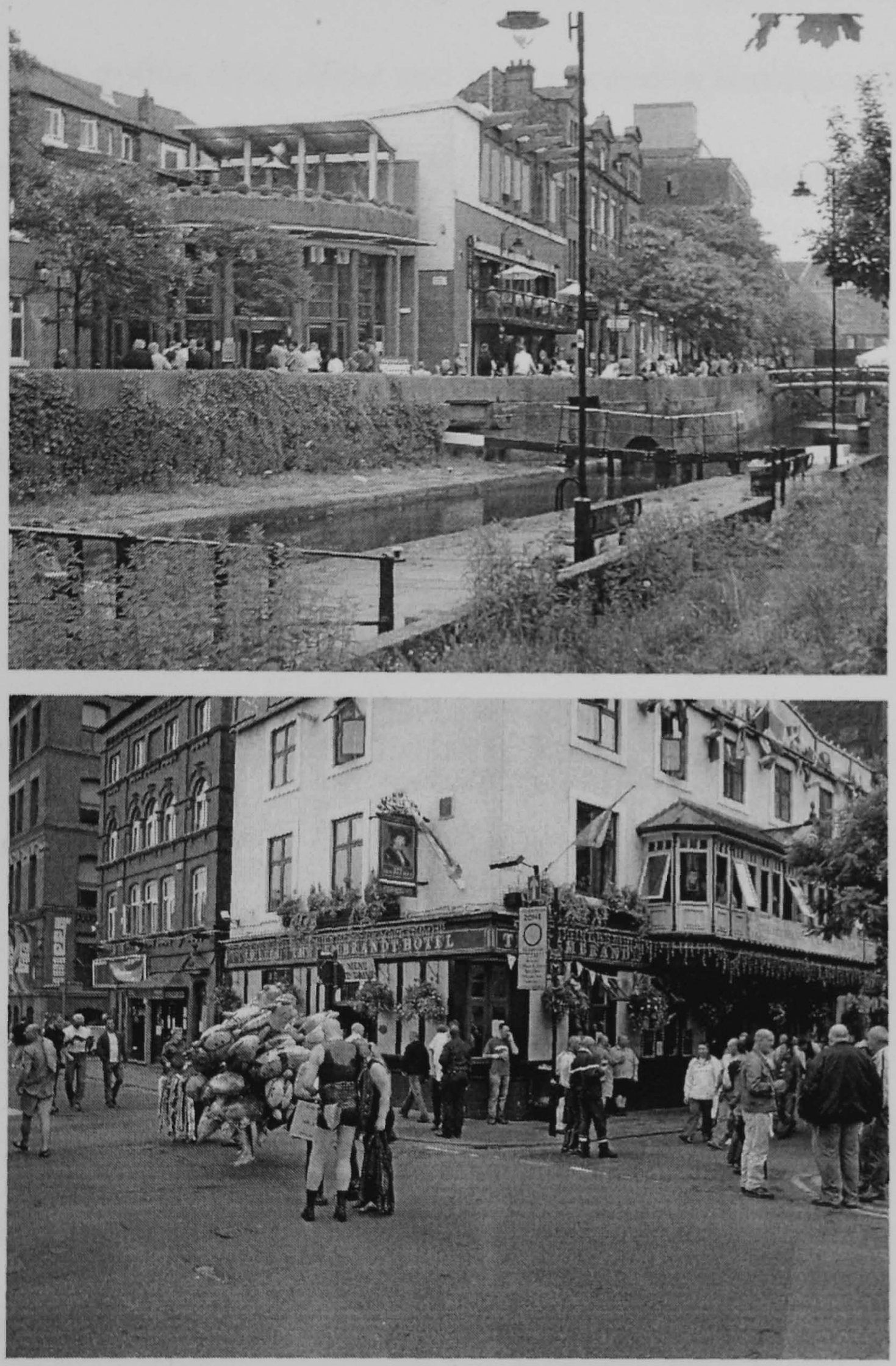
A simple bar with no delusions of grandeur, the Rembrandt was very plainly decorated and closed at 11:00pm on weekdays and 12:00pm at weekends. This was in contrast to most other Village bars which did not close their doors before at least 2:00am. The City Council deliberately granted bars in the Village late

licensing hours of the kind which are common in continental Europe in an attempt to add to the area's more liberal atmosphere. On entry to the Rembrandt there was a notice board which could be used to advertise accommodation, events and buying/selling items and once inside a variety of gay magazines were available. The men who socialised here tended to be laid back, down to earth, out for a drink and a cruise. Men typically had skin or short back and sides haircut and wore blue denim jeans, chinos, black leather and other older style masculine clothing.

Both during the day and in the evening the Rembrandt was a quiet place to meet. When music was played it tended to be of the 1970s and 1980s pop and electronically synthesised kind frequently played in older style gay bars. On long summer weekend afternoons, the bar would sometimes open its long French windows while a group of men who called themselves, the 'Praire Dogs', line danced outside. Younger, more trendy Village users who drank next door at Via Fossa would often look on in amazement.

Via Fossa

Via Fossa was one of the busiest and most 'mixed' bars in the Village. Part of a national chain of bars owned by Scottish and Newcastle brewery it attracted large numbers of gay men and straight men and women and a small number of



Plates 1 and 2 (above) Spirit and Manto and (below) The Rembrandt. Note the difference in style between older and newer venues.

lesbian women. On occasion an even smaller number of transgendered users could be found socialising in Via Fossa. In terms of age, most of those who frequented the bar ranged from their late teens through to their mid forties. Furnished with gothic style décor and heavy wooden furniture, Via Fossa was full of stairways leading to several different bars, a restaurant area and in the basement a dance floor.

During the daytime it was a quiet place in which to meet but in the evenings, especially at weekends, it played loud dance music into the early hours of the morning and was usually packed full. Most of the men and women who frequented Via Fossa dressed fashionably. Men typically wore tight fitted blue denim jeans or combats with short sleeve t-shirts and tended to play with ideas about sexuality in their dress styles by generally avoiding a conventional straight male look. The use of accessories such as rings, earrings, necklaces and bracelets, for example, was far more common. Hairstyles also tended to be much longer and more varied than those found amongst the men who frequented the Rembrandt next door. The overall effect was one of a young, fashionable look that was subject to frequent change as men sought to keep up with the latest trends in fashion. Many of the straight men that I met here enjoyed experimenting with this image of gay sexuality too. The dress styles of the younger lesbian women also tended to be more masculine than those of the straight women who socialised here. Lesbian women would typically wear

blue denim jeans, t-shirts and trainers as opposed to more feminine forms of dress such as a skirt, blouse and so on.

Many people frequented Via Fossa in mixed gay/straight friendship groups, though it was also common to find single groups of straight women drinking here as well. Alex, a straight man in his early twenties frequently socialised here with his two gay male friends as did Lisa, a lesbian woman in her early twenties, who could often be found in this particular bar with both gay and straight men and women.

Prague Five

Prague Five was regarded by many Village users as a straight bar and for that reason many gay people would deliberately avoid it. Set over two floors in a converted warehouse with bars on each floor, the décor had a very trendy minimalist industrial feel with solid wood floors, exposed brick walls and stainless steel staircases which led to a dance floor in the basement.

The bar tended to attract mostly young, fashion conscious straight men and women in their teens through to their late twenties. During the daytime it was popular with the lunchtime crowd, mid-afternoon the coffee and chat crowd and then onwards into the evening did the usual drinking trade. Prague was never busy and had a less intimate feel about it than most of the other bars in

the Village. Many of the men and women who drank here wore expensive designer clothing but of a more conventional kind than that worn by many of the people who drank next door but one in Via Fossa. The kind of music played in the evening tended to be contemporary house, trance and dance.

Although at the straighter end of the spectrum, this bar also attracted a number of men and women whose sexuality was ambiguous. Alistair, the bar manager, told me for example, that whilst Prague had always been gay driven and focused, it was perhaps true to say that about ninety per cent of the bar's clientele were straight. Many of those who used it according to Alistair were, however, open to playfully experimenting with gay sexuality once inside. Similarly he said that he had employed straight staff who subsequently decided they were gay. This may suggest that the bar was not as 'straight' as many gay users of the Village perceived it to be, like, for example, Edwin, a Chinese man in his late twenties, who whenever his gay friends suggested having a drink in Prague would adamantly refuse to go in on the grounds that it was a straight venue. Towards the end of fieldwork the bar began to fly the rainbow flag outside as part of a deliberate attempt to convince Village users that it was just as welcoming of gay people as any other bar in the Village. However, Edwin and many others like him were still not convinced, a measure of the extent to which individual Village users perceived venues very much in terms of being categorically 'gay', 'mixed' or 'straight'.

Vanilla

Vanilla was the Village's only dedicated lesbian bar. Lesbian women were underrepresented in the Village and this was not only one of the smallest bars but much to the annoyance of many it also let men in, even if not accompanied by a lesbian woman. With bright yellow walls and a very modern style pool table, Vanilla tended to cater for the younger crowd of lesbians.

Again, dress styles of the women here tended to be distinctively more masculine than those associated with straight women, but these styles were often combined with certain aspects of femininity. Hairstyles ranged from short back and sides to long shoulder length cuts, but most women tended to wear blue denim jeans, tight t-shirts, jean or black leather jackets, trainers or DMs. Rarely, for example, did these women wear skirts.

On one occasion when I went into Vanilla a man was sat at the bar drinking by himself and Louise, a lesbian woman in her early thirties, went up to the bar staff and assertively demanded an explanation as to why this man had been let on to the premises. The only explanation that she said she was given was that he was a regular customer and that it was against the law to have a door policy that discriminated on the grounds of gender. Although many of the women who socialised here desired women only space, they tended in the main not to be politically separatist in the way that lesbians have been portrayed in a

number of academic studies (Ettore, 1978, Wolf, 1979, Krieger, 1983, Lockard, 1985, Dominy, 1986, Green, 1997). However, the women who frequented Vanilla did still form a very distinctive marginal group within the Village. Louise, like many of the lesbian women that I met, socialised in many of the other bars in the area in mixed gay/straight friendship groups. When she frequented Vanilla, however, she wanted a space that was women-only. Only in a bar that admitted lesbian women only did she feel comfortable being intimate with other women without feeling that she was being watched over by straight men and women. As we saw above, men-only space did to some extent exist at the Rembrandt where women where either asked to leave or informed that they could only use the upstairs. Also, nearby Company Bar would not allow women onto the premises under any circumstances on the pretext that it was a gay men's 'members only' bar even though this was not really the case. In the view of many of its women users, Vanilla was, like many of the bars in the Village, reluctant to turn away paying custom.

b) Clubs

There were six clubs in the Village; Essential, Cruz 101, Napoleons, Poptastic held at a venue called Mutz Nutz, Legends and Berlin's. Generally speaking clubs tended to attract a mostly gay clientele possibly because they had much stricter door policies with regards to who they were willing to let in. Many lesbian women, for example, said that they found it difficult to gain access to

many of the clubs without a 'lesbian pass' – a small identity card confirming that the holder self-identified as a lesbian. Quite how one went about proving something like that, however, remained unclear. Once a month Cruz 101 in conjunction with Vanilla ran a night called 'Fussy Pussy' on which they would designate the basement a 'women's only' area, but again many lesbian women complained that men were allowed in. Napoleons also attracted a large number of transgendered users.

Clubs tended to attract people amongst other things according to what kind of music they liked. Essential, for example, was popular with young Village users predominantly in their teens and twenties who liked chart pop, house and dance and it had three floors that played each of these different types of music. Cruz 101 and Napoleon's on the other hand were particularly popular with older generations of gay men in their thirties upwards and, as such, played predominantly pop music from the 1970s and 80s. Poptastic was popular with Village users of a variety of ages who liked Indie music, while Legends on the very edge of the Village attracted mostly older S/M gay men, again in their thirties upwards, whose clothing was often gender divided depending on whether men were sexually dominant or submissive. Both 'dom' and 'sub' as they were nicknamed would tend to wear black leather jackets and trousers, sometimes with steel studs and chains. The 'sub' look, however, would often

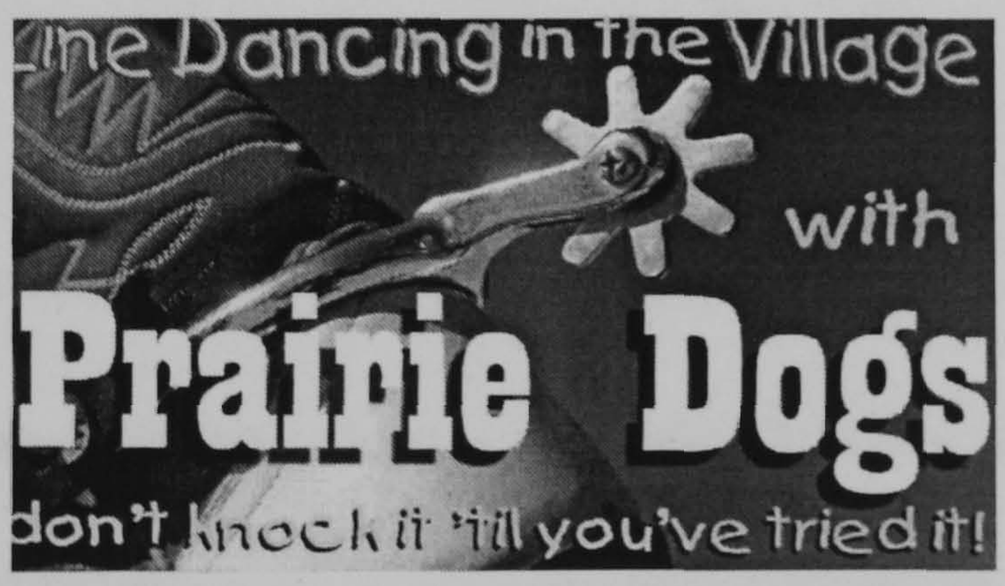


Figure 4 Flyers advertising events in the Village

include wearing trousers that left the bum exposed. Such styles enabled men to project their preferences in sexual practices and to be identified with the S/M sphere of the Village. This is in contrast to Essential which was generally seen to cater for a young, 'good looking', crowd who tended to wear clothing that had the more fashionable look mentioned above. It was no coincidence, for example, that every year Essential was chosen to hold the Manchester heat of Mr Gay UK, an event at which an audience consisting mainly of gay men, voted for the best looking contestant who usually won a small cash prize in addition to going through to the national final of the competition held in London.

Different dress and hair styles acted as a way of determining what different groups of people stood for. In an area that a range of groups frequented such dress and hair styles gave some indication as to what different venues represented too. Were they mostly gay, straight or mixed? Old or young? Predominantly male or female? What kind of music did they play? Many Village users like, for example, Tom, a gay man in his mid thirties, said that he felt that it had become extremely difficult to identify what the sexuality of many people was. He felt that this was especially the case in the more 'mixed' bars, where gay and straight identities met up and the distinction between the two groups had consequently become much more blurred.

c) Pride Festival

Pride is an annual event in Manchester as it is in many cities across the world (Brickell 2000, Gotham 2002, Kates 2001, Magden 1992, Marsh 1995, Stone 1996, Ward 2003). In 2003 the Pride festival was called 'EuroPride' and consisted of the coming together of the multiplicity of groups that we have already met above, as well as numerous others which tended to be more fragmented at all other times. This is because Pride was the most public of activities in which gay people engaged and so the intention was to put across an image of collective strength, a celebration of gay identity without feeling guilty. It was a way of making gay people visible. Many straight people living in Manchester would not have been aware of all the differences that cross-cut gay people in terms of gender, class, race and age and so broadly speaking the aim was to visibly present a united front.

However, the focus of Pride had become less about asserting gay identity and more about celebrating what had been achieved over the years in the quest for equality. During fieldwork, it consisted of ten days of events held all over the city, examples of which included a gay and lesbian film festival, campaigns and debates, sporting events, arts and cultural entertainment such as a heritage trail

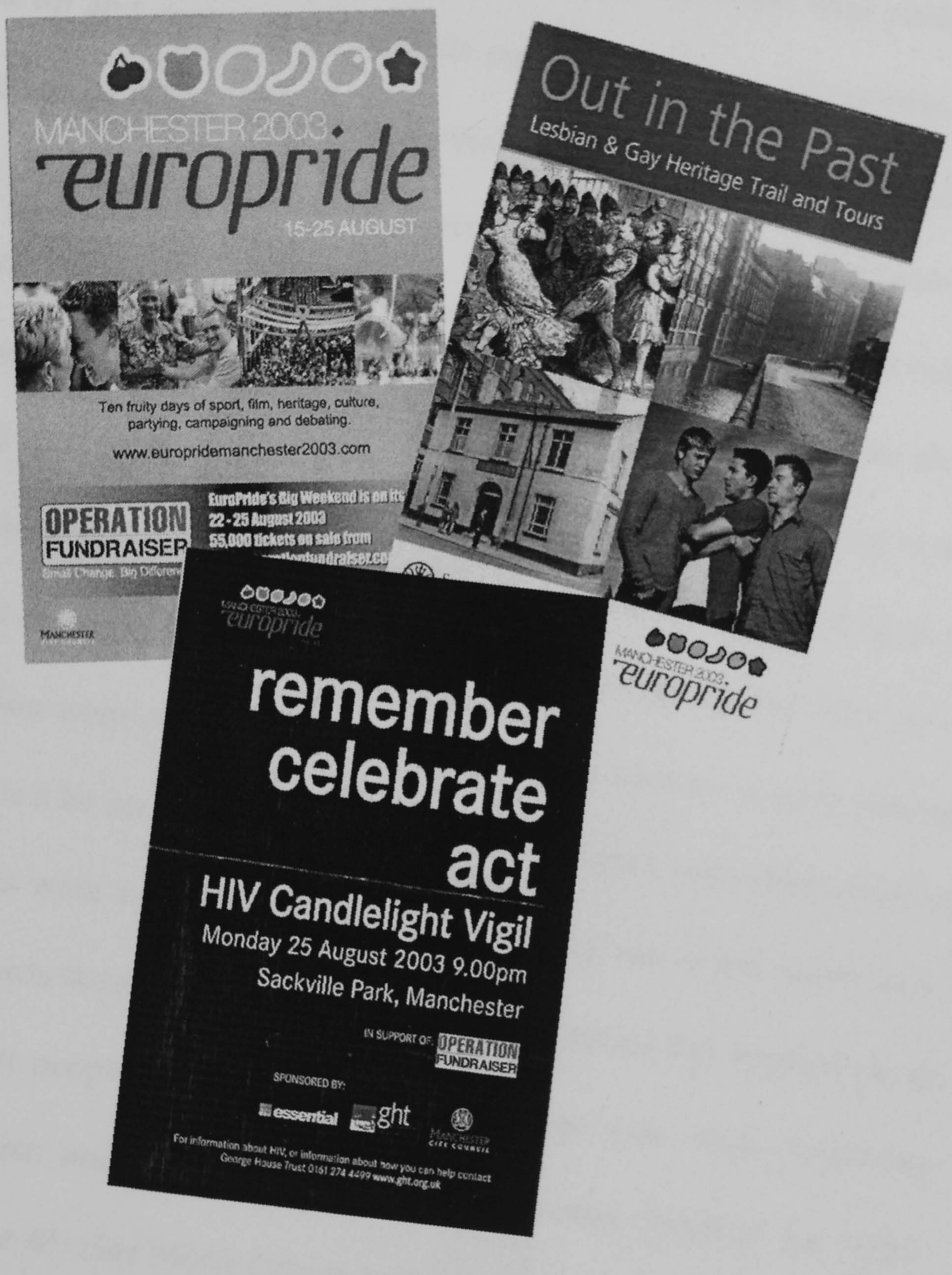


Figure 5 Leaflets advertising Europride

and numerous club nights. The event culminated in a long parade through Manchester city centre which lasted for some two hours. The parade had lots of pomp and ceremony surrounding it and many of those who participated dressed up and designed floats while onlookers lined the pavements on the route, cheering. Many of the representatives of bars, clubs, organisations and groups that marched brought banners and handed out advertisements to onlookers. The marchers, escorted by police, would occasionally break out into song. One float that was put on by the nightclub Cruz 101, for example, played music and during a well known song by the Village People - a group of men who were well known gay icons in the 1970s - a man dressed up in drag on the float turned down the music and subverted the words 'YMCA' for 'Why are we gay?'. He then went on to provide an answer of his own by singing 'because being queer is a lot more fun'. Issues like Clause 28 which were once central to such marches were no longer evident. This was in any event successfully repealed towards the end of fieldwork. Instead other issues that affected gay as well as straight people, such as, loneliness in old age were made visible. As such, the Lesbian and Gay Foundation's social groups, Sapphos for Older Lesbians and the 40+ Gay Men's Group, both of which will be discussed in the next chapter, marched with banners, as did Age Concern who drove by in one of their minibuses which flew the rainbow flag. Another banner read 'Pride Not Profit' and was a protest against charging gay people for attending pride events on the grounds that those on low incomes might not be able to afford to

take part. Openly gay police officers led by the city's Chief Constable even marched proudly in the parade, a real measure of just how much the fight for gay and lesbian equality had achieved and a far remove from the days of the one time city's Chief Constable, James Anderton, who during the 1980s, as mentioned in the previous chapter, famously declared gay people who used the Village area to be 'swirling around in a cesspit of their own making'. The parade was officially sponsored by Manchester's local radio station Key 103 but many other organisations who had provided sponsorship to the event as a whole were keen not to miss an opportunity to market themselves. Take, for example, British Telecom who drove by in a float which carried the simple slogan 'BT – Connecting People'.

The parade was followed by three days of entertainment in the Village over the Bank Holiday weekend, entry to which was by tickets which cost £10 each. Although some people, such as Brian, a gay man in his early thirties, complained about having to pay to enter the event, and saw it as Village bars and clubs seizing the opportunity to profit, many people went on to the Village. There were dozens of stalls selling books, crafts, clothes, food and beer. There were also several stages for shows and a separate women's only area. As mentioned above, gay men outnumbered lesbian women in the Village which is why a dedicated 'women's area' was set up for them. Pride always ended with a Candlelit Vigil, held to remember and celebrate the lives of those who had lost

Plates 3 and 4 Europride 2003 (above) a float put on by the nightclub 'Essential', (below) men wearing S/M clothing.

Plates 5 and 6 Europride 2003 (above) gay police officers and (below) Age Concern marching and driving through the parade.

their lives to AIDS as well as serve as a reminder of the importance of practising safer sex given that a vaccine for the virus has still not been discovered.

Europride brought a lot of money into the city and raised £127, 690[10] for local gay charities such as the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, an organisation that provided health information, a counselling service and ran a number of support groups: the George House Trust which provided information and services for people with HIV and numerous other charities that supported gay people. During Europride the Village as a whole tended to attract fewer straight people than it did at all other times. One bar, the Slug & Lettuce, which was widely regarded as a 'straight' venue was confronted by gay and lesbian Village users for not financially supporting the event even though it decorated its windows with rainbow flags as if it did. In protest people not only withdrew their custom but also went in and pulled the flags down. Similarly it was difficult not to notice during the event that while all the bars and the streets outside them were packed full, Bar '38', nicknamed by many gay Village users, 'Bar Thirty Straight', was always virtually empty, inside and on the section of street immediately outside of it.

[10] Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF) Annual Report (2003), http://www.lgf.org.uk/

2. DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

As a place, the Village was made by a wide variety of people who each had different perceptions and experiences of the area. In a brief outline of some of the explanations that people gave for using the area, some of what this meant, in practice, should become clearer.

a) Owners of Bars and Clubs

The different styles of bars and clubs and decisions relating to the kind of clientele that they aimed to attract rested with venue owners or the managers that they appointed, in the case of many of the bigger brewery owned sites. As already noted, with the exception of Company Bar, the Rembrandt and, to some extent, Essential, there were no official 'gay only' door policies with respect to the sexual orientation of the customers that were allowed to enter a venues premises. As Alan, a white, gay man in his late thirties who was responsible for managing Prague Five explains:

> *It all depends on your definition of a gay venue, is it a place that only let's gay people in, is it a place that doesn't let straight people in. [...] How can you tell whether someone is gay or straight. We are not a traditional gay bar, Prague is very trendy, it was the first bar with a good sound system, first bar that played really funky house and all that so we became pretty mixed but we*

have always stayed pretty gay focused in terms of the magazines we keep etc [...] This bar attracts everybody, people who are not sure of their sexuality tend to like to dabble here too without automatically being labelled as gay, so they come through the door and then realise within a few months on that they might be gay whereas in traditional gay only venues they might feel that they would be up against a huge barrier just going through the door. [...] On Friday's and Saturday's I'd hold my hands up and say that Prague is majority straight but we do have a very strong gay following as well as an ambiguous one. Trendy and fun is our image [...]. We don't tolerate hen parties here.

As far as Alan is concerned now that gay and straight identities have come into contact with each other in the Village, it is impossible to know what anyone's sexuality is. In his view this is because except in the context of what he refers to as, a 'traditional gay bar', being gay has as much to do with the style of a venue as what it does the sexuality of the people that make up its clientele. In this respect because Prague is fashionable it attracts both gay and straight users as well as those who are still in the process of deciding what their sexuality is. However, straight groups of women in the form of 'hen parties' - a term which refers to a woman's night out with her female friends before she gets married - are not tolerated as they are upheld by Alan as the antithesis of the venue's 'trendy and fun' image. Such parties are also seen as having the potential to

directly undermine gay identity given that historically gay people have not been able to marry in the same way that their straight counterparts have. Nick, a white gay man in his thirties who was responsible for managing Spirit, on the other hand, is more forthcoming about the bar's business interests:

I'd describe Spirit as a gay bar but we welcome straight people too. It was originally a private members bar for gay men only and it didn't work, the bar is too big for a private members bar given how much it costs to rent premises here, that's why I was brought in to turn it around. The bar is about 70 per cent gay, 30 per cent straight. We get quite a few transvestites on Wednesday nights too. The bar tends to attract a mixture of everybody, sexuality is not easy to define so we don't really have any door policies regarding who we let in, you can be who you want in here. The way the bar is very much depends on who owns it though really, some owners say keep the clientele select but then if takings are not good they say pack it full, that's how business works. The company who own it at the moment are not too bad actually, they seem to be looking at the bar's client base in the long term.

For Nick, it is profit that determines the kind of venue that a bar is. As he explains, while Spirit started out as a gay venue in the sense that those who used it were expected to define their sexuality as gay, when as a private members bar, it failed to be economically viable, its owners drafted him in to

generate more custom. This was achieved by abandoning the bar's 'gay only' door policy in order to attract a larger clientele.

b) Village Users

Village users themselves used the area to different degrees, frequented some venues and deliberately avoided others. Some users of the area saw being gay as something that a person essentially is in terms of their sexuality while others saw being gay more in terms of a lifestyle that anyone could engage with. In any event, gay people were no more easily identifiable as a group than straight people which is why there were also vast differences between Village venues. However, in order to accrue value from using the space, straight users of the area needed to be able to access a particular form of knowledge in terms of which venues were worth frequenting and which were not and so tended to navigate their way through the different bars accordingly. Their use of a particular venue usually depended on gay men in particular being different enough for the straight Village user to be able to constitute him or herself from but not too different to the point that it was found to be threatening. Straight Village users therefore moved through the space in a way that enabled them to playfully experiment with difference yet at the same time avoid feeling uncomfortable since they did not want to be seen to be invading gay space or to be accused of homophobia. Yet the irony is that by moving through different

venues in this way, gay identity itself was diluted, hence the reason why some bars came to be seen as more 'gay', 'straight' or 'mixed' than others.

Alex is a straight, white man in his early twenties from a middle class background in Surrey. He moved to Manchester to study for a degree at Manchester University and continues to live in the city where he works as a recruitment consultant. He has a girlfriend that he has been going out with for just over two years and frequents the trendier venues in the Village such as Via Fossa, 46 Canal Street, Velvet and Essential:

> *My main motivation for coming here is because it's a lot of fun, it's the sort of place you can come to and wear different clothes and it feels a lot more relaxed, as though it's got a more continental vibe to it where you can go out later, stay up till the early hours and it's not frowned upon whereas you've got quite strict licensing laws in a lot of straight places. [...] To my mind I've always been what you'd classify as straight though I have snogged [kissed] the occasional man down here as experimental fun and I'm not ruling it out that I won't go back to it. Once you're around something else, a gay scene, you think, oh why not. I think sexuality is something that's difficult to define these days, it transgresses boundaries, it's not set in stone that's for sure.*

With short black spiky hair, Alex was very image conscious. He worked out at the gym three times a week, was always very tanned and usually wore the latest denim jeans, tight t-shirts and blazer style jackets that were at the cutting edge of fashion at the time. For him the Village was a space where he felt able to wear different clothing and he once told me that he particularly liked to wear Vivienne Westwood clothes, a designer well known for her flamboyant clothing styles. His comment that the Village has a more 'continental vibe' also expresses a desire for identification with the more stylish, cosmopolitan side of the 'new Manchester' as a city. Many of the straight men and women who used the Village expressed similar sentiments which also demonstrates the city's success in commoditising gay lifestyle through the branding of the area in this way.

Sara is a straight, white woman, in her early thirties from a middle class background in London and works in Manchester for an IT consulting firm. She is single and again frequented the trendier venues in the Village such as Via Fossa, Gaia, Tribeca and Prague Five. She likes the freedom that she perceives gay lifestyle to offer her:

Gay people don't seem to worry about work on a Monday morning, life to them seems to be one long party... They're so lucky, only having to look out for themselves. I mean when you're straight life is so much more restricting,

you've got the husband, the kids ... And I find straight men and women so boring cos that's all they talk about. You just think get a life.

Sara clearly sees the Village as a space in which she is free from what she perceives to be the demands and constraints imposed by wider straight society, such as getting married and having children, and the responsibility that comes with these kind of commitments. She perceives the Village on the other hand as a space that allows her to transcend these kind of limitations by allowing her to explore and constitute herself. It is therefore ironic in many ways that she mostly frequented the venues that Village users regarded as 'straight'.

Will is a straight, white man in his early twenties from a working class household in Cardiff and now lives in Manchester where he is studying for a Master's degree. He also has a girlfriend of four years and frequents bars such as Via Fossa, Tribeca, Prague Five and Bar 38:

It feels quite safe here, you know there wont be any trouble, like groups of lads fighting etc. There are some really nice bars here too, really trendy by the Canal and I never see any hassle. [...] I like Tribeca, Prague Five and Bar 38. There's the one that looks like an old man's pub on the end [a reference to the Rembrandt] that I wouldn't go to [expressed adamantly]. I think those places are strictly gay aren't they in a sexual sense whereas the bars that we

go to are for the younger ones and I wouldn't say that they're stereotypically gay at all [said with certain underlying prejudices]. [...] In fact I don't really think of the Village as a gay area, more as a gay accepting area because as a straight man I've never felt out of place here [defensive tone].

Will likes the Village because he perceives it to be safer than many other parts of Manchester. His use of the area, however, and its perceived sense of safety is dependent only on certain aspects of gay identity being promoted and on the more threatening, less easily assimilated aspects of that identity, most specifically the sexual side of gay men's lives being rendered invisible. Hence, his comment that he only frequents the bars that are for the 'younger ones', that are not 'stereotypically gay' unlike the Rembrandt which he sees as catering for an older generation of gay men. Again, Will's comments are similar to those that were expressed by many straight users of the area, although for some like Anne, a white married woman in her early thirties who works as a solicitor in Manchester, it is the men themselves that are the attraction:

When you think gay you think trendy. Straight men, they just wear Ben Sherman and Rockport [men's high street clothing labels] whereas in here [Via Fossa] it's so stylish. [...] All the best looking men are gay, I think they look after themselves a lot more. I'm here with my husband tonight though so

they're quite safe although we have just had an argument, that's why he is over there dancing and I'm not.

Gay men, in particular, were frequently thought to be more individualistic and style conscious with few family commitments, more disposable income and more free time which also influenced how many of the straight men and women who frequented the Village fantasised about constituting themselves. Some studies have noted that because lesbians are less visible they are not as easy to commoditise as gay men and so therefore less profitable.[11]

For many gay Village users themselves being gay continued to be something that is essentially defined by a person's sexuality. As such, many gay people had a 'coming out story' – an account of the process through which they concluded they were gay, more or less accepted it, then revealed it to others. There were different ways in which people remembered the process but for all it established their identity as someone who was attracted to members of the same and not the opposite sex. Mark is a gay, white, middle class man in his early sixties from Wigan, a retired school teacher and married with two grown up children. He remains married to his wife who knows that he is gay and they still

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[11] See, for example, Clarke (1993) who notes how lesbians are rarely targeted as consumers because they are not as identifiable or accessible and therefore as profitable as gay men. For a discussion of why this is the case see Castells (1983) and Adler and Brenner (1993).

share a home together. However, he is also in a gay relationship with a man that he has been going out with for several years with whom he sometimes frequents the Rembrandt, the only bar in the Village that he frequents:

I refused to recognise it though it was obvious I was gay. [...] I had no relationships with women until getting married at 30 and remained a virgin till then. Despite that I still went to cottages, then two years into marriage about 32, I thought stop pretending. Then I recognised I was gay not bisexual and that I'd made a mistake, I had kids and a mortgage by then and had hidden this from everyone for twenty years. [...] My image of gay men, was what we call today a screaming queen and I thought I'm not one of those, I don't want to dress up as a woman [expressed in a very sombre tone]. [...] I went through all sorts of agony, I never felt suicidal but every time I had sex with men, I said that will be the last one. [...] When I first started using the area before it was called the Village, around the early 1980's, it was an area frequented mainly by prostitutes, it was a dark area, it was a secret area and that was good, you didn't want to be seen using it. You left the area with your collar turned up and looked left and right of you to see if anyone had seen you. It was in the first part of the 90s that the area started to take off. [...] I remember going into Via Fossa and feeling delighted with it in the mid 90s, instead of it being dark and seedy, there was a sense that the area was coming out. I was sat outside the Rem [a reference to the

Rembrandt] with my partner and some friends went by and I said "hi". I liked it at first but then in late 90s it suddenly ceased to be a gay area. In the early 1990s, it was still the closed, introspective Village, though we didn't call it a Village then, by 95 there was the feeling of its great to be alive and by 2000 it stinks [expressed with anger].

Mark's experience of coming to terms with his sexuality was a familiar one for many gay people who also had similar things to say about the way in which they had seen the Village change over the years. For Mark the 'coming out' process had taken years and had been difficult. Many gay people like him went through a 'bisexual' phase which they subsequently recognised as a time when they were unwilling to accept that they were gay. Sometimes this was because they could not connect what they had heard about being gay with themselves. For many gay people the Village had once provided a 'secret' space that allowed them to explore their gay identity with other gay people. At first Mark saw straight people using the Village as an overall positive development in the sense that it could perhaps be taken as a sign that gay sexuality was becoming more accepted within the British mainstream. However, it is the perception of straight users of the space becoming numerically greater and the area 'ceasing to be a gay area' as he puts it, that concerns him the most. Many of my gay co-conversationalists felt that too much straight use of the Village would result in the area being reclaimed as heterosexual space. Such fears were therefore closely

connected to the concept of 'safe space'. Straight use of the Village therefore undermined some gay peoples' sense of safety (Moran *et al,* 2003) in that they felt that a space that they had claimed as their own was no longer strictly theirs. Yet for other gay people, usually the younger generation in their teens and twenties who were arguably in a better position to benefit from earlier struggles for equality, being gay was no longer that big an issue and neither did they feel a need to maintain a separate gay space.

Lisa is a single white lesbian woman in early twenties from Wales. She is from a working-class background and is studying for a degree at one of the local universities:

I thought I was bi up to 17 but because I wasn't into my boyfriend I decided to give lesbianism a go and it worked [expressed confidently]. Basically, I didn't want to have sex with him and so thought, oh my god, maybe I'm gay [said with a very dramatic, cynical tone, she laughs]. I haven't had any problems/issues with it, my parents, mum, grandma, friends etc were fine with it. [...] I mainly go to Spirit, Bar 46 and BaaBaa, I like Vanilla but a lot of my friends are gay blokes and straight so we tend to go to mixed venues. We sometimes go to New Union for a laugh and I've been to New York [one of the Village's most 'gay' bars] which was ermm different [she laughs]. I don't go to Bar 38 because that's too straight. [...] But if we want

a more tolerant society I'm not sure we should be segregating ourselves in the fight for equality. [...] I met my first girlfriend on the internet, I went in and said are there any teenage lesbians in here? [again, said with a very dramatic, cynical tone, she laughs]. It's difficult to meet someone in the Village since with there being so many straights you don't know who is what. [...] Hopefully one day though people won't have to be confined to being gay or straight, we'll all be anything and everything [she laughs].

For Lisa and many others like her, 'coming out' was good fun and she frequented a wide cross section of the venues in the Village with both gay and straight friends. As she explains, however, this mixture of gay and straight people using the area was not without its problems when trying to meet someone with whom to have a relationship. Many gay people objected to the Village being maintained as a separate gay space, preferring instead to emphasise their 'individual' identities as gay people.

Carl is a single white man in his early twenties who lives in Manchester where he works in a bank. He liked to frequent Via Fossa, Spirit, 46 Canal Street and Essential:

No way should we try to reclaim the village as a gay only space, I like a good mix of people and as far as I'm concerned straights are very welcome to use

the Village. Besides we're all a clued up bunch of individuals aren't we? More than capable of deciphering the funk from the junk. I think things have moved forward an awful lot in the last ten to fifteen years and exclusion could only be a step backwards. Besides how would the exclusion zone be enforced? Would you have a wall built around the Village and have to have a ticket to get in? I know that's a very extreme metaphor but I'm sure you get my point.

Integration clearly finds favour with Carl who feels that each person who uses the Village ought to be judged on their own 'individual' merits hence his comment that 'we're all a clued up bunch of individual's aren't we? More than capable of deciphering the funk from the junk'. Many younger Village users expressed similar sentiments like Neil, a single gay white man in his early twenties who is studying for a degree at Manchester University:

Segregation is only going to hinder us more than them. Fair enough we don't want to lose our identity in the Village, but those of us that venture out of the Village don't want to lose out either. Every case should be evaluated on the individual wanting to get into the bar/club. I have plenty of well adjusted, open minded straight male and female friends that like to come to Essential with me and enjoy the company of gay men. Let the straights in if they'll behave themselves, some of them are quite cute.

While Neil appreciates that it is important to maintain a sense of gay identity, as a gay man who himself ventures beyond Village bars and clubs he feels that each individual should have the right to choose where they want to spend their free time, irrespective of how they define their sexuality. Neil is also opposed to segregation on the grounds that he also brings straight friends into the area. Indeed friendship provided a powerful motive for many gay people feeling that straight men and women should be allowed into the Village as Matthew, a gay white man in his mid twenties also points out:

> *Some straights are totally at ease with their sexuality and even add to the atmosphere of the place. What about those straights who have a load of gay friends? Is it fair to exclude them from being able to socialise with their friends when clearly they are at ease with themselves and those around them? We would be up in arms if a gay person went down to their local Brannigan's [a chain of straight bars] and was turned away because they were gay. So why as a minority should we think that it is totally acceptable to turn someone away from a bar on Canal Street just because they look straight. It sounds like discrimination is okay, just as long as we are not the ones who are discriminated against. In any case what does one have to do to prove they are gay, have sex with their boyfriend right in front of the doormen. Making generalisations that anyone who is gay must look a certain way hurts the community as a whole. Not all gay guys are 18 year old*

twinks [young gay men] *with blonde hair and spray on tan. I know many gay athletes, footballers, police officers, body builders and the wonderful thing about the gay community is that no one has to fit into a particular stereotype, we can all be ourselves. One day we will all wake up and realise that the gay community is not made up of just the Village and the bars around them, it is the community of friends, family, and neighbours that we have chosen to associate with. It is understandable why so many straights want to come into the Village and have a good time. They know that gay men and lesbians know how to party like no one else can, and I cant blame them for wanting to join us.*

Many of Matthew's concerns with segregation centre on the notion of what a gay person looks like. He is clearly unhappy with traditional ideas about being gay, especially the idea that gay men are all '18 year old twinks with blonde hair and spray on tan' as he puts it. He is particularly critical of ideas of being gay that centre on this kind of stereotype pointing out that he knows gay athletes, footballers and so on. His desire is to be like every other man, not to be pigeonholed, to be allowed to be gay in a way that works for him as an individual man. Once again his disagreement is with collective identities that impinge on personal identities based on choice and self-determination. Similar concerns were voiced by Adrian, a single white man in his early twenties from South Manchester:

It's the twenty-first century and time to move away from the ghetto mentality. Both gay and straight people come in all shapes and sizes. It's the yob element we need to keep out of all the bars irrespective of whether they are gay or straight. Last time I checked, one of the greatest things about being gay was being able to accept others. Surely seeing straight people in the Village means more and more straight people are slowly becoming more accepting of gay sexuality, is that not a good thing? More importantly is that not what people before us fought for, for all those years. If we start turning people away because of their sexuality, does that not make us as bad as everyone else?

Within the Village there was a strong division between those who wanted to maintain the area as a gay only space and those who saw integration as the way forward. Younger Village users like Adrian were often under the impression that the fight of gay activists for equality was about acceptance of gay sexuality and, for that reason, could not understand why many older gay people wanted segregation.

What these interview extracts show is that for many straight users of the Village being gay is perceived as something that attaches as much to 'things' that are imagined to make up gay lifestyle as what it does to a person's sexuality itself. As such, many straight users of the Village feel that the area offers them an

attractive lifestyle choice that they want to engage with because it allows them to enlarge the limits of their own sexuality. However, while many gay people themselves are in favour of the Village becoming a more integrated space, for many gay people being gay is still something that a person essentially is by virtue of sexual orientation and on that basis they would like to continue to maintain the area as a separate gay space.

3. VILLAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Where they existed gay relationships were generally very short lived, so much so, that long term relationships were regarded as exceptional. Only 18 of my 70 'gay' co-conversationalists interviewed were in relationships and many gay people felt that the use of the Village by increasingly large numbers of straight people had impacted on gay intimacy and sexual relations. As we saw above, when using the Village the most intimate relationship that many straight men and women seem to have is the relationship that they have to their own sense of 'self'. Thus when using the area straight men and women's concerns tend to focus mainly on what they want to attain from the Village, what kind of person they want to be and who they imagine they are when using this space. What still attracted many gay people to the Village, however, was the prospect that they might meet someone else with whom they could at least forge intimate and sexual relations, if not a relationship. Gay relationships represented the sexual

and therefore the most private intimate relationship that gay people had and so established their sexuality more than any other. Table 4 shows the type of relationship that my gay co-conversationalists had, and, where they were in relationships, the number of years they had lasted.

Table 4 Gay relationships

Type of relationship and length of time together	*n* = 70
Single	52
In a relationship	18
1 Year	14
1 - 3 Years	3
3-5 Years	0
Over 5 Years	1

Source Interview data

Many gay people felt that straight use of the Village had impacted on gay relations in the sense that no longer could anyone's sexuality be guaranteed. In this respect gay and straight people were often felt to have very different motives for wishing to use the area.

Andrew is a single white gay man in his mid 30s studying for a second Bachelor's degree in Manchester after having spent several years working as a parish priest. It had taken him a while to come to terms with his sexuality and he explains how he likes the parts of the Village that he considers to be gay:

> *I like the parts of the Village that are gay such as Hollywood, The Thompson's Arms, The Rembrandt and Cruz 101. The thing that pisses me off about the area as a whole though is the image conscious thing which makes me feel old. Straights come here because they like to drink in a place that's trendy and where they feel safe. I think gay culture for them though has a lot to do with music and dress rather than sexuality, its these things that are gay. There's a question mark around whether straight people really accept gay sexuality.*

As far as Andrew is concerned only four of the venues out of the twenty-four bars and six clubs in the Village are gay in the sense that their clientele consist mainly of people who define their sexuality as gay. While he appreciates the reasons why straight men and women wish to use the space he feels they perceive gay identity in terms of music and dress and questions whether they really accept the sexual side of it. Similar frustrations were expressed by Louise, a single, white, gay businesswoman in her early 30s who has also become very disillusioned with the Village:

*The male and female thing here **really** shocks me because there is no segregation, I mean they let men in Vanilla, one woman came in with three men the other week [amazed tone]. You go to Cruz 101s women only night and men come in there too and women are not free to kiss in public because they're worried about being watched by straights. [...] Before Queer as Folk it was great but unfortunately that has meant that all the straights have come in for a good gawp, there were coach loads of them coming after that [expressed with concern]. I'm not a feminist woman at all but sometimes I do want some space where its just me and other women and I'm missing it [expressed assertively]. [...] I've now turned to women's chat rooms to meet people. The internet is taking over completely, we're all turning to it. I know one woman who gets three shags a day off there.*

Not all gay people saw the impact that straight use of the Village had on gay relationships as an entirely negative development though. Simon is a white, gay man in his early thirties and was usually quite content with his life as a single gay man:

I don't have relationships now, as long as I've got friends that I can meet and go out with then I don't need someone there twenty-four hours a day, although there are times when you don't want to be on your own and fancy a good sex session but then again you don't want it to be just that so its

difficult. I've also got enough people around me as friends that I don't need to have a relationship anymore. Plus I feel my working life and interests in the arts have also taken over.

Simon's friendship networks came to be one of the main reasons why he used the Village nowadays. No two people, irrespective of whether they self-defined as gay or straight, had the same relationship to the Village. People used the area for a wide variety of reasons. However, for many gay users of the space sexual orientation is what still constituted the basis of gay identity and is what necessitated a separate gay space. That is why people like Ben, a gay man in his early thirties used some parts and not others:

The Village has gone from being just a few people who met up and spoke in palari [gay slang] to being a major visitor attraction which has destroyed any sense of community. There's Hollywood, I can go in there and see six people I know and so there are little pockets of community left that are still there because some of us stuck around, but a lot of gay people that used to come here gave up. I therefore find these little pockets and make it the kind of place that I want it to be. I don't buy into the commercialism of it all.

The Village consisted then of several different venues that were regarded as either 'gay', 'mixed' or 'straight' and although physically they were contained

within the same area there was often an uneasy co-existence between them. Village users rarely frequented all of the venues in the area. Instead they frequented those from which they felt they could accrue the most value which depended on both their experience and perception of the categories 'gay and 'straight'. Straight men and women, for example, who were interested in engaging with gay lifestyle tended to frequent venues that were regarded as 'mixed' or 'straight'. These were the venues that they felt most enabled them to enlarge the limits of their own sexuality by allowing them to create an image for themselves as more liberal, cosmopolitan, style conscious subjects. Some gay men and women on the other hand who continued to rigidly believe that being gay is still essentially defined by a person's sexuality preferred to frequent the venues in the area that were regarded as 'gay' or 'mixed'. It is important to remember, however, that sexuality was also cross cut by age, gender, class, racial identifications and so on which also affected the way that people navigated their way through the Village, if they did so at all.

4. People on the Margins of the Village

Not all people's experiences and perceptions of the categories 'gay' and 'straight' had changed in the way that they had for many users of the Village. Some gay people struggled to make sense of the way in which the Village had changed and cleaved to older ideas about being gay. In the Village young 'aesthetes' were well represented. However, among the groups that the area did not predominantly cater to were gay people in the process of 'coming out', older gay men and lesbians. To this end the Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF) provided meeting space outside of the context of bars and clubs and was 'home' to several support groups for those that the Village marginalised. The LGF also ran a range of other services designed to assist gay people such as a telephone helpline, face to face counselling service and a sexual health clinic. It was also an information resource for gay and lesbian history and literature.

In this chapter I look at the role of the LGF and some of the people that it brought together who cleaved to older ideas about what the categories 'gay' and 'straight' mean. The first section focuses on understandings of 'self' among the groups who consider that their identities as gay people are incompatible with those expressed in the Village. I then consider some of the explanations that people gave for using the LGF and draw out some of the ways in which they

perceive themselves to be different to Village users. I show that while the categories 'gay' and 'straight' are still perceived to exist within the Village, for many users of the LGF, their coming together and what they now mean in that particular context has changed. As such, many LGF users feel that these developments have resulted in the area becoming a space for a commoditised form of gay lifestyle that they themselves are unable to relate to.

1. THE LESBIAN AND GAY FOUNDATION (LGF)

The LGF is located just outside the Village in a small modern red brick building called Unity House. The entrance to the building was via a small side street and its identity was poorly marked. The door was electronically controlled and a security camera was fixed on it, an expression of the need to provide 'safe space' for gays and lesbians in Manchester. The space was made safe by the idea that the gay and lesbian groups that used it were the same in relation to the world outside of it. That world was represented as heterosexual and was what in the eyes of many gay and lesbian men and women generated the inequalities that necessitated the need for the LGF. The LGF was 'safe space' so long as it continued to represent particular interpretations of gay and lesbian identity.

The LGF was established in 2000 from the unification of Healthy Gay Manchester and Manchester Lesbian and Gay Switchboard Services. Manchester

Lesbian and Gay Switchboard was set up in the mid 1970s to help the growing number of men who 'came out' following the decriminalisation of gay sexuality. Since being merged into the LGF it continued as a helpline which operated every evening of the year from 6-10pm. Trained volunteer operators provided a free and confidential helpline service to any gay or lesbian man or woman who needed it. Outside of these hours an automated system was in operation which provided information on bars and clubs, support groups, health services and the LGF itself. When it was created in 1994, Healthy Gay Manchester gained a reputation for a daring, often cutting-edge approach to gay men's HIV prevention and sexual health promotion. Its information resources were not afraid to reflect safer sex issues as raunchy and fun.

As well as providing support groups for those that the Village marginalised which will be discussed in more detail below, the LGF provided a range of other services including face to face counselling sessions. These sessions allowed men and women to work with a counsellor to explore issues that were causing distress in their lives in a safe, accepting, environment. The main purpose of counselling was to help people find a way of understanding why they experience what they do and was not about giving advice, telling people what they should do or offering friendship. Some of the men and women that I met used the service to help them 'come out' or to explore other issues around their sexuality. However, a whole range of other issues were also covered including

HIV, sexual health, bereavement and self-harm, gender identity, mental health issues, anger management as well as specialist relationship counselling for individuals and couples. A team of over 20 counsellors donated their time in order to provide the service. While a fee payment of £1 for every £1000 of income was usually paid by those who used the service nobody was ever denied access to counselling because of an inability to pay.

The LGF also ran a clinic which provided a full sexual health service designed to increase the uptake of screening, testing, vaccination and treatment services by gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women. The aim was to reduce the number of undiagnosed sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV. During fieldwork the clinic provided gay men with vaccinations against Hepatitis B. However, despite the outreach work of LGF workers in the Village, for reasons that are not clear, very few men turned up to receive vaccinations. In addition, a Condom, Lube and Distribution Scheme was also run which was probably the only visible aspect of the LGF from the perspective of the average Village user who had never set foot in Unity House. Ensuring that every gay man in the Greater Manchester area has access to condoms, lube and safe sex information was one of the LGF's highest priorities.

At Unity House there was also a lesbian and gay archive and library of resources. A dedicated team of volunteers worked to index and catalogue items,

including gay and lesbian fiction, academic sources and a periodicals section with gay press dating back to the 1970s. The LGF was also committed to providing services that are needs led and evidence based. Research was therefore a high priority for the organisation. As well as engaging with the most up to date research in the field, the LGF actively involved itself in generating its own research too. During fieldwork, for example, two large scale surveys were conducted addressing lesbian and bisexual women's sexual health and the prevalence of drug use amongst gay and lesbian people.

The LGF felt a bit like a doctor's surgery in that the walls were covered with posters and fliers highlighting health issues and advertising forthcoming events, requests for volunteers, housing, safer sex information and so on. Upstairs consisted of an office where its 18 members of staff and volunteers worked and downstairs was the reception and one small and one larger room where the discussion groups met. Overall it was a small and plainly decorated functional building that was at the same time inviting. On most days there were a variety of men and women present in the building. Some came in for face to face counselling: others came in for discussion groups or drop in health clinics or to use the archive and library resource. Hazel, a lesbian woman in her mid thirties, was usually the first person that you met on entry to the building. She was rather a stern character who tended to err on the side of caution until you got to know her. Nonetheless she said that the most rewarding aspect of her job as a

receptionist at the LGF was when upon leaving the building people said to her 'thanks Hazel'. She said that then she knew that people had felt 'safe' whilst at Unity House. Volunteers would also appear most days, their backgrounds varied greatly but all were either gay or lesbian which was the only criterion for using the LGF: being gay or lesbian was a central part of these people's lives and they felt the world beyond the LGF was problematic in various respects. Divisions between users of the LGF were most evident on the grounds of gender, especially as far as the women were concerned. In any event, sexuality was only one aspect of LGF users' lives and as important were their gendered identities as men and women. During fieldwork 7315 people visited Unity House and the LGF worked with a total of 1,435,786 people across all its services. Table 5 shows the age range of those who used some of its services and the gender of visitors to Unity House expressed as a percentage. The support groups that the LGF provided are described in more detail below.

2. SUPPORT GROUPS

Most of the support groups that met at the LGF consisted of men or women who came together because they shared similar identities that were not well represented in the Village. Support groups were essentially 'gay space' in that they excluded straight people whereas the Village brought gay and straight people into contact with each other. Groups met regularly and members often

Table 5 Users of LGF support groups

Service, age of users and gender of visitors to Unity House	Percent of Total %
Helpline	
16-24	12
+ 25	75
+ 45	13
Support Groups	
16-24	25
+ 25	75
Face to Face Counselling	
- 25	12
+ 25	68
+ 45	20
Gender of Visitors to Unity House	
Men	60
Women	40

Source: Lesbian and Gay foundation Annual Report (2003), LGF

formed close relations with one another. Often individual members did not get along, however, since while they might have shared commonalities in terms of their sexuality, gender, age or 'coming out' phase these factors were still cross cut by their own individual personalities and especially by class differences.

The groups were relatively informal, as people arrived they sat in easy chairs around a coffee table, drank tea and coffee and ate biscuits. Groups were run by volunteers who had a clear idea of what it meant to be gay or lesbian. During group meetings few challenges were made of other men or women and when they occurred they were not taken as personal attacks but disagreements open to amicable discussion. As the group members held substantially the same perspectives, it was easy to discuss difficult issues without tension. For a short time, the continual challenges to their representations present in the outside world were excluded. This was as close to 'gay' space as it got outside the context of gay bars and clubs which as we have seen were not always perceived to be categorically 'gay' but often 'mixed' or 'straight'. Many of the men and women who used Unity House were either uninvolved in the Village or used it to a much lesser extent. By the same token men and women with a large network of friends who were more centrally involved in the Village did not attend support groups. In fact many Village users did not know where the LGF was or what it really stood for. Many would, however, have seen its logo on safe sex resources distributed in bars and clubs in the Village, if they had not also

seen the LGF represented at the city's annual Pride event which brought different groups together. Groups allowed gay men and lesbians to meet, socialise together and keep in contact between meetings if they so wished.

Sapphos

Sapphos was a support group for older lesbians that met on the first and third Tuesday of the month at Unity House between 7-9pm. Many of the women who attended this group were now dealing with the issues that they faced later on in their lives as older lesbians. The group was set up in recognition of the fact that older lesbians have a triple minority status of age, gender and sexual orientation.

The first person I met on attending Sapphos was Mary, a lesbian woman in her early fifties who had been the group's project worker since its inception. She was a committed lesbian activist who had been involved in a variety of campaigns before. Mary explained to me that it was a lack of clear evidence-based information about the needs of older lesbians that led her to take to the streets during the 2001 Gayfest Pride Festival, to carry out a survey to gauge women's knowledge of lesbian health issues. She told me that coupled with the findings from the LGF's Older People's Survey, one of the top issues that concerned older lesbians was isolation and loneliness in old age. This was due to the fact that many of the women did not have family support or children to

care for them as they got older and the prospect of being cared for in a nursing home where they could be subject to homophobia was very daunting indeed. Some women had also lost partners which had led to their isolation and loneliness. Mary worked hard to increase the group's membership and knew how to deal with external agencies so as to improve the group's chances of attracting grants. As such, she had succeeded in attracting funding for Sapphos from Comic Relief, a charity committed to supporting long term projects to help people in need in Africa and the UK.

The Village was only a small aspect of many of these women's lives and as well as having an emphasis on fun, the group aimed to offer a safe space for women to come along and have a chat. There was a strong sense of unity between the women who attended this group and as well as being close friends some of the women that I met were also in long term relationships with each other. Grace and Kate and Anne and Sandra were couples in their late forties and early fifties who had been together for several years. Other women, however, had joined the group to meet other lesbian women like, for example, Brenda, a lesbian woman in her early sixties, who said that she had joined the group after the death of her partner because she felt very lonely.

The hair and dress styles of the women who attended the group were less varied and less fashionable than those of the younger lesbian women who

frequented the Village. Most of the women had short back and sides haircut and tended to wear blue denim jeans, chinos, cotton blouses, short sleeved polo shirts, woollen jumpers and zipped sports tops. The dress styles of the women were generally very masculine. The clothing styles of some of the women who were in long term relationships with each other were also often gender-divided according to whether they were sexually more masculine or feminine. This division is often referred to by older lesbians as 'butch-femme'. Take Grace and Kate mentioned above, for example, who had been in a relationship for several years. Grace had brown short back and sides haircut and would typically wear chinos, polo shirt and flat black shoes whereas Kate had long blonde hair and would occasionally wear a skirt with high heel shoes, make up and accessories such as bangles and earrings. The dress styles of Anne and Sandra were similarly gender-divided. This was something that I did not see very often among the younger women who were in relationships that frequented the Village. Then again do not forget that I did not meet many people there who were in long term relationships, in any event.

In addition to the fortnightly meetings, the group co-ordinated activities such as theatre trips, meals and museum visits and also facilitated events at Unity House including tea dances and quiz nights.

Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones was a support group for lesbian women who were coming out or new to Manchester. The group met on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month between 7-9pm at Unity House.

There was a shared perception among the lesbian women that attended this group that the Village predominantly catered to gay men and that lesbians were either ignored, tolerated or even excluded altogether. As such, this did not make the Village a very safe space for lesbians to 'come out'. However, the women who attended Stepping Stones were not so united in their understandings of their sexuality as was illustrated, for example, in group discussions where they were asked what being a lesbian meant. A much wider variety of responses were given than what I heard from the women who attended Sapphos. Alison, a single woman in her early twenties said that she was a 'gay woman' rather than a lesbian, a term which many of the women who attended Sapphos understood as meaning that they were not politically active. The need for such a group therefore clearly had more to do with wider gender divisions than it had to do with sexuality. The common assumption outside the Village that lesbians and gay men had a lot in common was frequently undermined by these kinds of divisions that existed between them. Historically gay men have commanded higher incomes than lesbians and as a result have been able to frequent commercial bar and club scenes more often. Given that gay men were generally

dominant numerically in the Village, lesbians were frequently made to feel marginal.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century many of the young women who attended Stepping Stones would have had jobs that would have paid them salaries that were equal to, if not higher than those earned by men. However, because the Village was male dominated owing to the way in which it had developed historically, it did not predominantly cater to lesbian women, young or old. Furthermore some of the women that I met at this group like, for example, Michelle and Sally, two single women in their late twenties, had young children, having been in heterosexual relationships before 'coming out'. In Britain generally it is common for women rather than men to be awarded custody of the children where heterosexual relationships dissolve. This was also a factor which very often contributed to lesbian mothers having much less disposable income and free time than gay men. On one occasion, for example, when I visited the group, Michelle and Sally had both brought their children with them. Whereas childcare was not an issue that I ever saw the men who attended LGF support groups having to contend with.

The hair and dress styles of the women varied greatly. Some women wore clothing similar to that worn by younger lesbians who frequented the Village, but others did not. In any event, Stepping Stones did not provide a 'gateway'

into the Village in the way that Icebreakers did - the 'coming out' group for young gay men - who always went on to bars in the Village afterwards. While some women did go out for a drink when the group finished at 9pm, the vast majority did not. In fact three of the lesbian women that I met at the group would often drink in one of the straight pubs opposite the LGF rather than walk up to the Village. This might be interpreted as a measure perhaps of the extent to which they felt underrepresented as women in the Village, if not also an expression of the extent to which they felt they had little in common with gay men.

Gay Men's 40+ Group

The Forty Plus group consisted of gay men aged forty and above and met at Unity House every Thursday at 7:30pm. Activities ranged from talks to quizzes and watching videos.

The group was led by a volunteer called Dean, a single, gay, white man in his early forties who had relaunched the group after a difficult start. Dean explained how when expressions of interest in the possibility of setting up a group were first sought, a lot of men had been very keen. However, when the group was first launched he said that very few men actually attended. Dean himself was a very disillusioned gay man who said that it would not bother him

Figure 6 Services and support groups run by the LGF

in the slightest if he woke up one morning and discovered he was straight. His character could not have been more different to that of Mary's, the Sapphos group project worker, who as already mentioned was a very committed lesbian activist. However, Dean said that he had managed to increase the group's membership as well as resolve some of the personality clashes between some of the men who tried to dominate the group during its early days. He said that personality clashes were the main reason why other men stopped attending.

The Sapphos women who had long been used to being underrepresented in gay bar and club scenes were content with the fact that they at least had a support group through which to affirm their identity as lesbian women and thus network. However, there was more of a feeling amongst the men who attended the Forty Plus group that they had once enjoyed a prominent place in the Village but that now that the area had changed so much it no longer catered to them. More important was their sexuality rather than their gender identity as men. That is why many of the men that I spoke to like, for example, John, a single, gay man in his late forties, explained how they felt that it was thanks to the fight that men of his generation had put up for gay rights, that younger gay men had a space like the Village at all. Many of the men therefore felt that it was ironic that the Village did not predominantly cater to them anymore. Unlike the Sapphos women many of the men like, for example, Philip, a gay man in his early 50s, said that he did not see the difference between gay men and lesbian

women. What he could not understand, however, was why straight men and women would want to frequent the Village. He said he thought that for straight people the novelty would have worn off by now. To my knowledge none of the men who attended the Forty Plus Group were in relationships with each other and the bonds between them did not seem to be as strong as those between the Sapphos women. They attended the group because they felt marginalised in the Village. The experience of marginalisation had led many men like Tom, a gay man in his mid fifties, to feel very lonely and isolated, especially as he did not have any family in Manchester either.

The hair and clothing styles of the men who attended the Forty Plus group differed markedly to those of the younger gay men who attended the Village. Most tended to have short back and sides or shaved haircut and again dress styles were much less fashionable and varied. Men typically wore trousers, shirts with collars and long sleeves, woollen jumpers and lace up shoes. When meetings ended very few of the men who attended would go on to Village bars afterwards. Many said that they had not been there for several years.

Icebreakers

Icebreakers was a group for gay men who were either 'coming out' or were new to Manchester. The group met at Unity House every Wednesday night from 8-9:30pm. Most members of the group then went on to the Village, usually

starting at Spirit and then sometimes venturing on to other bars. This part of the evening was optional in recognition of the fact that some members of the group might feel nervous about going on to the Village. Meetings were usually run by four gay volunteers. During the time that I attended the group it was run by four volunteers who had all 'come out' themselves through Icebreakers.

On the first meeting of each month the group ran a 'coming out night' when volunteers spoke about their own experiences and suggested strategies for 'coming out' which members of the group then debated. Occasionally it also ran safer sex nights which consisted of a presentation and discussion about men's sexual health. At all other times, however, men were left to chat among themselves freely. Although the atmosphere in the group was generally relaxed this required deliberate effort as many of those who used it faced the daunting realisation that they were going to have to completely reconstruct their social lives. Usually friendship occurs spontaneously by meeting people through work, friends, family and so on but the men who attended this group had to 'intentionally' make friends. The men dealt with the process in different ways. Learning and deciding what being gay meant was central to what this group was about. For most it involved a mixture of apprehension and excitement about this new identity.

Exchanging 'coming out' stories was a central part of making friends within the group and established a bond based on common experience. However, it soon became clear that the sexuality of these men was just one aspect of their identity. Very often issues of difference between the men based on class and race, arose. On one occasion, for example, the group set about planning a weekend activity. After a lengthy group discussion about possible options attendees were asked to have a think about what they might be interested in doing and to come back with some suggestions at the following week's meeting. However, three of the men took it upon themselves to arrange a weekend away in Blackpool and prior to the next meeting had already asked those attendees that they liked and got on well with, if they would like to go on the trip. At the next meeting, Nigel, one of the group's volunteers, who always made his views crystal clear, objected to this idea on the grounds that such an event might not be financially viable for all members of the group. He suggested that the kind of activity that he had in mind was a meal out, a video evening or a night out in the Village. The three men who had already begun organising the trip knew that if they wished to challenge Nigel they would have to make considerable battle of it and so simply kept quiet and just went to Blackpool anyway. However, although I did not personally go on the trip it, was clear when the group returned that differences between them had arisen. Mark said that he had not enjoyed the trip because he felt that being from a middle-class background he had nothing in common with the three working class men who had organised it. He said the only things they

wanted to do were drink alcohol and go to male strip clubs. The three organisers in turn said that they found Mark to be rather snobbish and said that Kenneth, a Chinese man had ruined the trip because he was far too bossy. They also said that they could not tolerate his foreign accent. Even after the trip the three men went out of their way to avoid Kenneth and subjected him to much ridicule. However, unlike Stepping Stones - the group for lesbian women in the process of 'coming out' - once members of the group had made new friends, Icebreakers had done its job. Members then left the group because their main reason for attending no longer existed. Once they had found a group of friends to hang out with the men usually met up in the Village of their own accord. When they saw people in the Village that they knew from Icebreakers who they did not like or get along with, they would normally just stay out of their way.

Again the dress styles of the men who attended Icebreakers varied. The vast majority of the men who attended the group dressed plainly, typically wearing blue denim jeans, casual sweatshirts or woollen jumpers. Some men dressed more masculine or feminine than others but their overall look did not change frequently. Most men did not keep up with the latest fashion trends like, for example, the men and women who frequented Via Fossa, that we met in the last chapter. The overall look was rather a much more understated one.

2. DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

All the men and women who used the LGF had a 'coming out story'. Take, for example Lee, a white gay man from a working class background in north Manchester. He works as a sales assistant at the local railway station and was in the process of 'coming out' which is why he attended Icebreakers:

> *I don't feel the Village is a safe space in which to come to terms with my sexuality in the sense that I am afraid that I might bump into people from work before I feel ready to be open with them about the fact that I'm gay. I do go to the Village but I make sure I only go to the more gay bars whereas I know I don't have to worry about anything like that coming to Icebreakers because it's strictly gay space.*

Differences between gay people in terms of whether they were in or out of the closet with their sexuality still clearly had to be reckoned with in one way or another. Frequenting the Village was difficult for many gay men in the process of 'coming out' of the closet with their sexuality as many men feared that they might run into straight men and women that they personally knew. Many lesbian women were also frightened of frequenting the Village owing to the fact that area was very male dominated.

Alice is a single white lesbian woman in her mid twenties from a middle class background in Edinburgh who now lives in Manchester where she works as a physiotherapist. She frequents the Village occasionally but particularly likes attending Stepping Stones:

The Village is very male dominated, I mean I can go down there some nights and its like hunt the lesbian. Its hard for lesbians coming in the Village but I think for black people it must be even harder, it is still very white. I like Stepping Stones because its accessible, you can just come in, sit down and have a chat. I was chatting to a couple of gay men the other night and they were talking about sex rings and saunas. Can you imagine if women did that, they'd all sit there talking about their cats. Women and men are definitely very different but we ought to all be able to share the space. A lot of women don't feel welcome down the Village, especially if their not slim and beautiful whereas this is a space that's outside of all that. We don't question any woman who comes through the door, its about being completely accessible.

Alice like many women that I spoke to feels that the main difference between the Village and the LGF is that it is much more accessible to women. She feels the Village is far too male dominated and that gay men and lesbian women are very different from each other. She clearly feels, for example, that gay men and

lesbian women seek different things from a relationship, hence her comment that women are more interested in companionship and men more in sexual relations. She also feels that there is a certain pressure on women who frequent the Village to be physically attractive unlike at Stepping Stones which she feels is completely accessible to all.

4. LGF RELATIONSHIPS

For users of the LGF it was the fact that they were sexually attracted to members of the same and not the opposite sex that established their sexuality more than anything else. While the Village had once afforded the opportunity to meet other gay people and to forge such relationships as George, a single, white gay man in his late fifties who works for the local Council explains, this is no longer the case:

> *I'm a very lonely old gay man. Occasionally I go to the Village but it has changed so much, we used to have something in common in that being gay was under raps and it was more personal, I found it easier to get to know people there back then than what I do now but nowadays it seems to be more geared towards the younger element which is fair enough, I mean why shouldn't it be, but it's also more mixed now, of course, which on one level breaks down barriers between gays and straights but it's removed that sense*

of gay space, lost that special something that it used to have which is sad. Now people just come for a raucous good night out rather than to meet people which is why I come to this group. The only time gay people really come together now is during Pride, in terms of fundraising, there is still that element I suppose

George clearly feels that while the bringing of gay and straight people into contact with each other is an overall positive development, it has nevertheless divided the gay community at the same time. Many of the older women who attended Sapphos expressed similar sentiments.

Judy is a lesbian woman in her early forties from a working class background. She lives in Manchester where she works as a bank manager and has a partner that she has been in a relationship with for five years. She does not frequent the Village very often but is a regular attendee at Sapphos:

The Village is frightening to me. It used to be something different but now it is just like going in to any other bar in Manchester. I don't go to Vanilla, it's too young and trendy and loud, they let men in now as well for the money. For men its all about sex whereas for women its more about doing things together like a quiz or something. Women and men are very different, we as women are much more united I think because we've got nothing else. So we

go round to people's houses and socialise. I think women are more emotional than men.

As far as Judy is concerned the Village is no different to straight bar and club scenes in Manchester and as a lesbian woman she finds it frightening. In keeping with many of the women that we met earlier in the Village she objects to the fact that Vanilla which is supposed to be a women only bar lets men on to the premises. However, being an older lesbian she also finds it 'too young and trendy and loud' as she puts it. Like Alice she feels that men are more interested in sexual relations unlike women who are more interested in companionship. She explains that this is why women tend to create more informal social networks like, for example, going round to one another's houses. Other women like, for example, Anne, a single white woman in her late thirties who works for an IT firm in Manchester, also complained that they did not feel that the Village was a very safe space for lesbian women:

I've had agro from straight men, usually of the are you looking at my girlfriend type who just in throw their weight around, but the worse thing is it's usually in Vanilla which is supposed to be like a women's space. One night some women I knew turned up and they brought some straight men with them and we were just sat round talking but then this guy objected to me talking to his girlfriend and went for me. I thought to myself, I'm sat here

in Vanilla, in the women's bar in Manchester and I've got a straight man who wants to fucking kill me, what's going on, this isn't right, this is not supposed to be happening. I suppose it's par for the course really, though you expect that sort of thing in straight bars but it's a bit bad getting it in gay bars. At the end of the day I don't like Vanilla, it's a young crowd, its not a particularly friendly place to go into. I usually just feel so fucking queer and ancient when I go in there because I'm twice their age. Once you're over 30, that's it, you've had it, it's the same with all scenes but I like going out, I like dancing so I make the effort.

Many of my lesbian co-conversationalists said that they felt that straight use of the Village was particularly problematic for lesbian women in a way that it was not for gay men. Some women said, for example, that many straight women enjoyed using the Village with gay male friends but then felt uncomfortable in the presence of lesbian women. Other women complained that they felt uncomfortable being the object of the gaze of straight men in the Village. Many of the men and women that I spoke to at the LGF said that it was friendship relations that formed a major part of making them feel that they were part of a community as Susan, a lesbian woman in her mid forties explains:

There's a lot more hostility in the Village now, gay people don't care about each other like they used to. It used to be like one big family, everybody stuck

up for each other, if say someone was hassled because of their sexuality we would put them in a car and drive them off somewhere else whereas now gay people would leave each other for dead. I don't know whether that's because of all the straight people coming into the Village or because the bars are no longer run by gay people like they used to be but it's just not close knit anymore.

During difficult times, friends were expected to provide support to each other. In this respect many of my older co-conversationalists explained to me how they felt that the friendships of the younger gay people who frequented the Village appeared to be very thin and centred on very little more than the moment. For many of the women who attended Stepping Stones and Sapphos their gendered identities as women were just as important as their sexual identity as lesbians and many felt that it was the fight and the struggle that they had as 'women' that united them as a group. As Marie, a single white lesbian woman in her mid thirties from a working class household in Manchester explains:

If you think about it growing up as a lesbian woman in Moss Side like I did, if I hadn't have found feminism when I was 12 or 13 I think I'd have topped myself because there were no role models out there. Growing up in a deeply working class environment I didn't know anyone like me, I mean just being a

woman in an area like that is bad enough, so feminism did me a favour. You see a lot of the younger ones haven't got anything to cling on to. People say politics is dead but a lot of the young ones just hate themselves and their self loathing is so deep. Feminism filled that void for me. I like to think of feminism as something that I've lived though rather than read. When you ask whether I'm a lesbian feminist, you're normally talking middle class lesbians who've been hiding away in women's studies departments for the last twenty years and who don't know shite. So I am a lesbian and I'm a feminist but the two together conjures up images of white, middle class, university educated lesbian feminists who make a lot of assumptions about the nature of people.

In what Marie still considers to be a male dominated world feminism continues to be her saving grace. While lesbians could frequent the Village, the cross-cutting factor of gender affected their experience of the area which is why many became involved in women only groups. The common assumption outside of gay communities that gay men and women, in particular, have a lot in common was further undermined by the kinds of differences existing between them at the LGF. Such differences clearly had a lot more to do with wider gender divisions than what they had to do any kind of politics of sexuality. However, while the LGF discussion groups offered women only space, that is not to say that issues of difference between lesbians did not arise.

Such differences did not appear to divide the women that attended Stepping Stones and Sapphos though in the same way that they did divide the men who attended the two support groups that the LGF ran for gay men. Then again lesbian women were numerically much smaller as a group than gay men which may explain why they tended 'to stick together' as one of my co-conversationalists put it. Many of the men, however, also felt that young gay people were unable to form strong bonds of friendships with each other because they no longer had a common cause. As Alan, a gay man in his mid fifties who attended the Gay Men's 40 Plus Group explains:

I think the older ones form a community but not the younger ones, I think they just turn up. They've got nothing to fight for, we did the fighting for them when we were younger and they won't realise what they've got till its gone. They haven't got a focal point, nothing to hang onto. I was on the Clause 28 marches, we got tables and chairs, the lot thrown at us. Back then we were a community in adversity, homosexuality was illegal and there were always campaigning issues in the area, people campaigning for equality. Although back then the gay scene was fragmented spatially you had that sense of community because the gay population was small, there weren't all that many of us. Historically the Village was an area of semi-derelict warehouses that closed down at 5 or 6 o clock. The streets were very poorly lit and we used the pubs there because we liked the fact that you weren't

seen. Then there was this very sudden transformation from the early 90s which seems to have resulted in a more fluid attitude to sexuality than what my generation had. I think today young people are just here to enjoy the music, the ambience.

As far as Alan is concerned homophobia is very much the precondition for a gay community which inevitably struggles for its existence the more that it becomes a part of mainstream society which as far as he is concerned has the effect of dividing gay people. Although Trevor, a single, white gay man in his early fifties from Liverpool can see why a younger generation of gay men see sexuality issues very differently to what his own generation do, as far as he is concerned there is still a long way to. As he explains:

I feel as though the issues are still there for us. I mean the younger ones really see things differently to the way that we see them, that's because they haven't experienced the fight and the struggle that we have had. And I mean, if you think about it, why should they see things the way that we do. But it does worry me, this idea that there is no need to be politically active these days because although we have come a long way, if you ask me there's a still a heck of a long way to go.

While the categories 'gay' and 'straight' provided continuity between the Village and the LGF what they meant in these two contexts was not the same. As this overview of the LGF and many of its users has shown, there were still many groups of people whose experience and perceptions of being gay and being straight had not changed. In contrast to many of the people who frequented the Village, the vast majority of users of the LGF did not gain any enjoyment from enlarging the experience of their own sexuality by pushing at the limits of the gay/straight binary. As such, they did not want a space like the Village which centred on playfully experimenting with identity but rather a space in which to be gay, as they felt they themselves had determined it through their sexual orientation.

5. Theoretical Insights

Throughout this study I have argued that amongst those who had institutional, commercial and community interests in the Village there was no single interpretation of what it meant to be gay or to be straight and that as a space the area reproduced contested understandings of sexuality. What exactly it meant to have a gay Village was therefore continuously being questioned in a way that it had not been before it started to attract large numbers of heterosexual male and female users.

Having described the Village in Manchester during the time that I did fieldwork there in 2003 and introduced some of the people associated with the area, in this chapter I compare my own material to that of other anthropological studies of gay and lesbian communities. The communities studied by other anthropologists relied upon believing in the authenticity of the categories 'gay' and 'straight' as a basis for creating separate gay and lesbian communities. The questioning of the idea that categories of sexuality are at some fundamental level different in my own material by contrast, led many gay people in Manchester to feel that their community was fragmenting. With this in mind, I ask what insights my material has to contribute to relevant theoretical debates within anthropology.

1. COMPARISONS ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

Within anthropology there have been numerous studies of gay and lesbian communities similar to the one in Manchester. The majority of these studies however have tended to focus on gay and lesbian communities in the United States where scholars have long recognised that as a response to the presumed heterosexuality of everyday spaces, gay and lesbian men and women began to build communities of their own in a number of major cities. Several studies have examined the struggles of gay and lesbian men and women to build homogenous gay communities in homophobic cultures and societies (e.g. Castells, 1983, Newton 1993, Kennedy and Davis 1993, Hawkeswood 1996). Esther Newton (1993) describes Cherry Grove summer resort community on Fire Island, near New York as a place where gay people were free to "come out" of the closet with their sexuality without fear of hostility. According to Newton the resort is predominantly gay male and the emphasis on gay male sexual practice which has shaped the culture of the resort often makes lesbians feel like outsiders. Newton describes the Meat Rack, the location of outdoor male sexual activity, for example, as a central element of the resort's identity and gay male sexual practice as key to belonging to the community. While female sexual practice is implied at Cherry Grove for lesbians it does not delineate community membership in the same way as it does for gay men. Manuel Castells' (1983) investigation of the symbolism of gay bars and clubs in

San Fransisco claimed that they incorporate and reflect certain characteristics of the gay community such as secrecy and stigmatisation. Moreover, he argued that they do not accommodate the eyes of outsiders, that they have low visibility and can only truly be known from within. Castells also maintains that gay men and lesbians used space differently which reflected their respective gender roles. Gay men it was argued acted primarily as men and were more territorial, had more disposable income, and desired the visible spatially defined commercial bar and club scenes. Whereas lesbians by contrast acted primarily as women, were not territorial, relied more heavily on informal networks rather than commercial facilities, tended to be more politicised than gay men and created lesbian space within feminist networks (Castells 1983, p.140). The conclusion of Castells' work in relation to what lesbians and gay men looked like was that they led lives distinct from each other and from wider straight society.

In other studies of gay and lesbian communities sexual desire has been less directly a focus of concern than the desire of gay and lesbian men and women to create strong community networks to meet their needs of friendship, romance and kinship (e.g. Weston 1991, Kennedy and Davis 1993 Hawkeswood 1996). Kath Weston's (1991) study of how gay and lesbian men and women in San Fransisco conceptualize kinship illustrates the importance of kinship in the lives of men and women whose positions within biological kinship have been

undermined by their homosexuality. Weston shows how when gay and lesbian men and women are rejected by their blood families for coming out of the closet with their sexuality they create kinship relations with friends within the gay and lesbian community. Such families of choice depend on shared understandings of what kinship is supposed to be like in American culture in terms of expectations of enduring loyalty. Given that gay and lesbian men and women have been rejected by their biological kin relations with friends are thought to be no less contingent. Instead families of choice can be depended upon unconditionally and therefore embody qualities conventionally associated with biological kin. Similarly in his study of gay black men in Harlem in the United States William Hawkeswood (1996) describes the network of friends that are referred to as 'family' through which these men support each other emotionally and financially. Hawkeswood describes what it means for these men to be both gay and black and argues that they identify as black before they identify as gay. So strong are the bonds of family between gay black men that although the AIDS epidemic affects both the gay and the black population as a whole it has limited effect on Harlem's black gay men who apparently choose their sexual partners exclusively from among Harlem's other black gay men.

To date there has only been one anthropological study of a non-heterosexual community within the United Kingdom. However, Sarah Green's study (1997) of a lesbian feminist community in London in the late 1980s adopts a

radically different take to those which focus on gay and lesbian communities described above which immediately highlights the significance of the social and cultural context. Instead of viewing gay and lesbian communities in homogenous terms Green's study illustrates how the feminist theories on which lesbian feminist separatists had based their lives were being seriously challenged particularly from within their own community. Younger women entering the community were more interested in sexual desire and having fun than what they were in feminist politics and lesbian feminist theory was frequently accused of not taking differences between women, such as race and class, into account. Compounded by other external pressures such as the abolition by Margaret Thatcher's administration of London's radically socialist local government, the Greater London Council, led by Ken Livingstone, which had previously provided lesbian feminists with funding to promote themselves, the lesbian feminist community started to fragment. The community resembled according to Green something akin to what Benedict Anderson (1991) might term an 'imagined community'.

There are no gay and lesbian communities similar to the one in Manchester outside of the Euro-American, Australian and New Zealand contexts. Anthropology's most recent work on sexuality has, however, devoted considerable interest to the question of whether Western style gay and lesbian identities and communities are being transmitted to non-western contexts via

a globalizing influence. Much has been made of the rise of the 'global gay' (Altman 1996a, 1997, 2001, Binnie 2004) who is invited to consume a range of global communication such as institutionalised pride events, travel guides and the internet. Such forms of communication have, according to scholars of the 'global gay' discourse, resulted in a shift away from the kind of gender identities that anthropology has long studied such as that of the berdache, the *hijra,* the *kathoey* and the *bakla* to a specifically gay and lesbian sexual identity. According to Dennis Altman, one of the most prominent scholars of the 'global gay' discourse:

"There is a clear connection between the expansion of consumer society and the growth of overt lesbian/gay worlds: the expansion of the free market has also opened up possibilities for a rapid spread of the idea that (homo)sexuality is the basis for a social, political and commercial identity … The 'macho' gay man of the 1970's, the 'lipstick lesbian' of the 1990s are a global phenomenon … *The Economist* is probably correct in suggesting that the very diffusion of modern homosexual identities throughout the world is part of both economic and cultural globalization " (Altman in Sinnot 2004, p.25-6).

However, anthropological work on sexuality has played a major role in illustrating that the 'global gay' discourse attaches a very simple term to what are actually much more complex globalising processes (Bereket and Adam

2006, Blackwood 1998, Boellstorff 2005, Carrier 1995, Carrillo 2002, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002, Donham 1998, Elliston 1999, Essig 1999, Girman 2004, Herdt 1999, Jackson 1997, Johnson 1998, Knauft 2003, Lancaster 2002, Lumsden 1996, Manalansan 2003, McLelland 2000, Morris 1997, Murray 2002, Parker 1999, Rofel 1999, Sinnott 2004, Sullivan and Jackson 1999, Tan 1995, Wilson 2004, Wright 2004). This it has done in two main ways. The first of these recognises that while globalisation has impacted on the way that many people in non-Western cultures and societies perform their sexuality such changes can only be understood in terms of 'local' discourses (e.g. Jackson 1997, Johnson 1998, Parker 1999, Lancaster 2002).

It is argued that category 'gay' has no universal cross-cultural value and must therefore be applied carefully by anthropologists during fieldwork practice to avoid essentialist interpretations. In some cultures and societies, for example, while gay sexual identities exist those who perform them do not necessarily self-identify their own sexuality as 'gay'. Peter Jackson (1997), for example, stresses that Thai gay identities have not simply evolved through a Western globalising influence because Thai men still have a third 'traditional' category, that of the '*kathoey*' (1997, p. 189). The term *kathoey* refers to an effeminate form of masculinity and thus to his encounters with masculine men. Whereas the category "gay" has made a third kind of masculinity possible that is situated between masculine men and *kathoeys*. In the Thai context being gay means

being both masculine and engaging in sexual relations with other masculine men rather than with effeminate men like the *kathoeys*. In a similar vein Mark Johnson (1998) has explored local understandings of the term 'gay' amongst feminine identified men who engage in sexual relations with other men on the island of Sulu in the South Philippines. He points out that while an imagined American gay identity provides an important reference point for many such men, knowledge of this does not represent a whole scale engagement with American gay identity. Instead the imagined possibility of gay relations in America is used to support 'local' understandings of them. Richard Parker (1999) also demonstrates how in Brazil men who self-identify as gay perform very straight identities despite the fact that they engage in gay sexual relations. The main terms used to refer to active and passive gay sexual roles are the words *dar* and *comer* which broadly equate to the acts of being penetrated and to penetrating. Such terms are, however, accommodated within normative masculine encounters with no accordingly gay self- identification. Men who are penetrated on the other hand are identified as feminine and this carries a social stigma (1999, p. 30). Similarly Roger Lancaster (2002) has also demonstrated how gay sexual relations in Nicaragua make relationships between men integral to the social and cultural construction of masculinity. As in Brazil, to penetrate an effeminate man is a way of acquiring honour through the shaming of the feminised 'male' partner. Sex between men is viewed as central to the achievement of straight identified masculinity (2002, p. 41-68).

Anthropology has, however, become extremely sensitive to the fact that an emphasis on either "global" or "local" processes fails to capture the complexity of the way that people now perform their sexuality in many parts of the non-Western world. As Megan Sinnot (2004) points out by emphasising an earlier point made by Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly:

"If difference (from the West) is emphasized, the subject is exoticized and positioned as "other" in an Orientalist-like discourse. Conversely, if sameness (with the West) is emphasized, historical and social processes are often ignored or simplified" (2004, p.43-44).

A second critique of the idea that Western style gay and lesbian identities are being transmitted to non-Western cultures and societies via a globalizing influence therefore seeks to place issues of hybridity onto the agenda by demonstrating that new gay and lesbian identities are emerging which cannot be interpreted as either purely "local" or "global" (e.g. Manalansan 2003, Sinnott 2004). Martin Manalansan (2003) illustrates how Filipino gay men who immigrated to New York City negotiate between Filipino and American sexual and gender identities, specifically the *bakla* and gay identity. The term *bakla* includes homosexuality, hermaphroditism, cross-dressing which are viewed as central to effecting a change of gender identity. Through beauty pageants, however, the *bakla* comes into contact with American symbols of beauty.

Manalansan uses the Filipo word *biyuti* rather than the English word 'beauty', however, in recognition of the fact that the Filipino word allows for shifting concepts of beauty which are integral to the *bakla* as a system that is cross-cut by gender, class and race. Filipino men make use of competing cultural tradititions to create a distinctive "hybrid" identity of their own (p.ix-x). Similarly Megan Sinnott (2004) illustrates how a pair of female identities have emerged in Thailand known as *tom* and *dee*. A "tom" refers to a masculine woman who is in a sexual relationship with a feminine woman referred to as a "dee". Thus a "tom" is from the English derived term "tomboy" and "dee" from the English derived term "lady". While these same-sex relationships divided into masculine and feminine pairs illustrate how on the one hand global capitalism has facilitated the emergence of a Western style lesbian identity the categories *tom* and *dee* are in fact hybridizations of local categories of gender. According to Sinnott masculinity and femininity which in the West are often constructed as being stable in the sense that they are based on sexual identities contain in Thailand a considerable degree of contradiction. As such, contradiction is constantly played out through a growing number of organisations and social clubs, websites and discussion groups as sexual identity says little about a *tom* or a *dee's* sense of self as being masculine or feminine which is why instead the term "gendered sexualities" is used to refer to the two identity categories. In the Thai context *tom's* are understood as females who are sexually attracted to "women" which is thus viewed as an extension of their masculine gender but

being sexually attracted to a woman does not necessarily guarantee a *tom* identity. *Dees* on the other hand, like all other women in Thailand are referred to as *phu-ying thammanda* (ordinary women). Sexual identity then does not unite *tom* and *dee* identity which are instead distinguished from each other along the lines of differences in gender. Tom Boelstorff (2005) attempts to go further than Sinnott and Manalansan by demonstrating that whatever it is that a global gay discourse seeks to transmit via a globalizing influence, the effect on gay and lesbian identities when viewed, in practice, in Indonesia, is that its meanings takes on a significance all of their own that cannot so easily be categorized as "local", "global" or even "hybrid". Instead, Boellstorff (2005) shows how Indonesians use the terms *gay* and *lesbi* but regard them as "authentically Indonesian" because they have become part of what he calls a "dubbing culture" of its own (2005, p.7). Although the wider straight Indonesian society is not aware of them gay and lesbian Indonesians use the term anyway to interpret "local" experiences despite the fact they know full well the terms are not local ones. In contrast also to the stereotype of Western gay men being affluent and privileged consumers, most gay and lesbian Indonesians are not at all affluent or even middle class. Rarely also have they ever met a Western gay man or lesbian woman, seen Western gay and lesbian publications or read publications produced by *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians. Understandings of the terms gay and lesbian are typically derived from world religions, colonialism, capitalism and nationalism but none of these authorities globalise a gay discourse. Instead the

terms *gay* and *lesbi* are purely national ones which is how the "archipelago concept" which emphasises Indonesia as a country that finds unity through its diversity expects Indonesians to understand their world. Boellstorff emphasises, however, that this nationalist rhetoric is not like a discourse since it is not intentionally produced which is why instead he says that there is a "cultural logic" to being a *gay* or *lesbi* Indonesian rather than a discourse, as such. For Indonesian gays and lesbians the terms *gay* and *lesbi* are the result of national belonging that centre on the heterosexual image of the nuclear family as ironic as that may seem from the point of view of Western gay and lesbian identities. In this way the Indonesian terms *gay* and *lesbi* are therefore distinct from the English terms "gay" and "lesbian" and, as such, have their own cultural history (2005, p. 7). In this context the categories *gay and lesbi* are thought to transform the Western categories "gay" and "lesbian" into a cultural system of meaning all of its own that cannot be easily understood in terms of a discourse of the "local" "global" or even a "hybridization" of both.

In focusing on its traditional object of study of the non-West the discipline of social anthropology has not studied gay and lesbian communities in the West itself for some time. In contrast to anthropological work on sexuality carried out in the non-West which has been slow to assimilate the theoretical insights of queer theory in the sense that it continues to view sexuality as a consequence of gender, my own work attempts to reconfigure the relationship between gender

and sexuality. Specifically it looks at how in the Village in Manchester men and women who self-identify their sexuality as 'straight' are rethinking what it means to be straight from the perspective of being gay.

2. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH THE MANCHESTER MATERIAL

The Anglo-American studies paint a picture of men and women trying to create separate gay and lesbian communities of their own. The 'community' meant different things to different people but self-identifying one's sexuality as gay or lesbian was always a criteria for membership. Life outside the community was seen as less authentic than life inside the community. It was the inequalities that existed within the wider socio-cultural context that generated the need for a separate gay community. In all cases friendship networks were important and in some cases were referred to as fictive kinship (Weston 1991, Hawkeswood 1996). The common assumption outside of gay and lesbian communities that gay men and lesbians have a lot in common, however, was frequently undermined by the fact that in practice they led lives distinct from each other as well as from wider straight society. Where communities consisted of both gay men and lesbians, lesbians were marginal (Castells 1983, Newton 1993). If the gay and lesbian communities described above were seen as important in terms of uniting men and women on the

basis of sexuality, according to some accounts, differences between men and women such as gender, class and race clearly had to be reckoned with (Newton 1993, Green 1997, Hawkeswood 1996). Gay and lesbian communities were after all one expression of the wider culture and society in which they existed and differences in terms of race had to be dealt with because they were not anywhere near as separate as some of their gay and lesbian members may have 'imagined' them to be.

The changes that the gay community in Manchester were dealing with during the time that I conducted my fieldwork there in 2003 were in part a product of the larger historical conditions which Green discusses for lesbian feminists in London. The difference was that Margaret Thatcher's reduction in funding for marginalised groups in the late 1980s was not lost on Graham Stringer, the Leader of Manchester's Labour council, who when faced with a choice between resistance or a U-turn concluded that cooperation with the Thatcher Government represented the only way forward. In this way gay people in Manchester continued to be viewed as allies in a shared struggle against the state but were strategically incorporated into Manchester's culture led regeneration strategy as part of the city's attempts to transform the image of Manchester from that of a declining industrial city into an exciting, vibrant and cosmopolitan place in which to be. This change in City Council policy towards the area, which was to see a switch from working with gay activists to working

with gay entrepreneurs was to mark the beginning of gay sexuality being transformed into an object of heterosexual male and female desire.

The use of the Village by men and women who self-identified their sexuality as 'straight' undermined the basis on which a separate gay community had been created. I was frequently told that prior to many of the newer bars opening which did not sees themselves as catering exclusively to gay people and prior also to the filming and screening of the two television dramas which brought the area to the attention of local, national and international audiences there was a much a much stronger sense of community. Many gay people who had witnessed the changes first hand therefore felt that these developments had subjected the Village to a process of fragmentation and disjuncture as a number of my co-conversationalists explained to me during fieldwork.

Tim is a white gay man in his mid thirties and has been frequenting the Village since the early 1990s. He explains how to his mind the Village has changed over the years:

The first bar I went in was a new bar called Manto, it was the first of its kind with long windows, it wasn't seedy, dark and dingy. The Village has gone from being just a few bars to a few more bars to a few more bars. The Village is no longer a gay community it's a collection of commercial businesses there

to make money. The few venues that are gay focused are under pressure from the other venues to inflate prices. I go to venues according to the company I'm with. I tend to stay away from 46 Canal Street because its too trendy and the trendy bars are the ones that straights go to. When I first started using the Village it was a gay space, you knew that people weren't looking over you. The main reason why I object to straight people coming is because of their absence of understanding. The Village space was built up from nothing, going back prostitutes and gay men used to use the Union. The prostitutes carried contraception for the men and then when the pub was raided by the police gay men and prostitutes would pull together and act as though the protection was for her. When straights come in to the Village they don't come into a safe haven that gays and lesbians have built up over the years, they go to trendy bars and drink alcopops. They don't see the depth of it, the fight and the struggle that we have had.

Tim feels that as the Village has expanded with the opening of a large number of newer bars the area has lost its identity as a gay community in the sense that economic profit is now the main reason for its existence. He also feels that that the use of the area by large numbers of straight men and women has weakened the area's significance as a gay space. He feels particularly bitter about the fact that straight users of the area have no or very little understanding of the historical context in which the space emerged. Similar sentiments were

expressed by other gay men such as Jon, a white gay man in his early forties who had been using the area even longer than Tim:

> *There is a shadow of a community but unfortunately it won't come back until the big breweries pull out. The Village started out with just a few bars, the proximity between the Rembrandt, New Union etc was enough to make them separate, a bit like London's but on a much smaller scale. When Manto opened you got like Bar 38, Via Fossa, spending millions of pounds gutting them out, needing lots of people to go in so relaxing door policies. An example is Spirit which used to be the car park for Manto, they put a manager in called Alan who introduced an over 21 door policy and introduced a gay and lesbian membership scheme. It was a nice venue but then the brewery said takings are not what we want, relax the door policy. Then everyone started going in and it became loud and rowdy so the manager left. He went to work for the Manto group at Gaia. Basically a quality gay space was hoisted out by the brewery that owned it. Same with Via and Bar 38. People in the Village don't know your name anymore or what you drink like they used to. Hollywood used to have sing-alongs, a pianist there said it's the only place where you can play 'you never walk alone' and people know it's from the musical Carousel. Now people go in and they play it and they don't know that and don't sing along. There isn't that feeling now that you can walk down the street and wave to every third or*

fourth person and know who their boyfriend is. Now you can walk down Canal Street and not meet anyone you know.

Jon feels that the area has become much more impersonal owing to the competition that bars are under to attract custom in order to remain economically viable, hence his comment that "there isn't that feeling now that you can walk down the street and wave to every third or fourth person and know who their boyfriend is". According to Terry, a white gay man in his mid thirties, this has much to do with the fact that gay and straight lifestyles have as he puts it 'met up'. He feels that the Village no longer exists as a gay space and that most of the bars in the area are not that dissimilar to straight bars in the rest of the city:

Straights like it because it's a space outside their expectations. A lot of it's media related as well. Queer as Folk killed the gay community even more, it promoted stereotypes that gay men just go out on the pull but it also showed the trendy side, canal, lights etc. At one time I can remember Japanese tourists pulling up in a coach and getting all their cameras out and taking photos of Canal Street. The loft house living that it showed, for example, makes up a very small percentage of the community. When it was a community if you were a bit short of money the bar owner would say, oh, pay me next time. If you got drunk the bouncers wouldn't just kick you out,

they would help you out and friends would take you home. Pedestrianisation made the Village feel like a community but then that also Europeanised it. Then when the European thinkers came along we started getting bars like Prague, Abbaye, Via Fossa, Tribeca, fancy light posts and that shifted the emphasis. I think gay and straight bars have met up, whereas you used to have gay bars that let straights in, now a lot of the bars in the Village are like straight bars that let gays in.

In contrast to the Anglo-American anthropological studies referred to above as the community became more diverse it had also become more impersonal. While friendship networks existed, for example, they were never referred to as fictive kinship as the existing literature on gay and lesbian communities leads me to expect. The friendship networks of younger Village users seemed relatively thin in the sense that they appeared to centre on little more than the opportunity of the moment while gay men frequently complained that since becoming an epicentre of commoditisation it had become increasingly difficult to meet other gay men with whom to forge intimate and sexual relations. It must be remembered, however, that with the exception of Green's (1997) study of lesbian feminists in London all of the anthropological studies of gay and lesbian communities reviewed at the beginning of this chapter were all based in the United States. This is an important point since in terms of drawing out similarities and differences between the existing literature on gay and lesbian

communities with my own material it must be recognised that the United States is obviously not the United Kingdom. If within the United States within gay communities gay people refer to each other as fictive kin this may be due to the fact that traditional family values are also much stronger within the wider American culture in which they exist as Weston's (1991) study suggests. In her study of lesbian feminists in London, however, Green equally notes that although kin terms were never used there was a sense in which friends were regarded as fictive kin. But again it must be remembered that during the late 1980s when Green conducted her study Margaret Thatcher was implementing Section 28 to prevent left wing councils from undermining the fabric of British social life by promoting positive images of homosexuals. As such, the clause prevented local authorities from suggesting that homosexuality constituted 'a pretended family relationship'. In other words I agree with Michel Foucault (1987) [1976] that oppositional groups usually conform to social and cultural conventions as much as non-oppositional groups. By the time that I conducted my study the centrality of kinship to many people's lives had declined within the wider British context, hence the development of increasingly large numbers of men and women remaining single. Some scholars do continue to maintain however that kinship is still highly significant within the context of the United Kingdom at large. Outside of the discipline of social anthropology Jeffrey Weeks *et al* (2001), argue in a similar vein to Kath Weston (1991), that families of choice are on the increase among non-heterosexual people and that this development

reflects developments within the wider heterosexual community. It must be remembered, however, that while such families of choice may be on the increase they are increasing during a time in which the autonomy of the individual, free of relationships, is greater than ever before. As Zygmunt Bauman (2003), has commented the central figure of contemporary society is the man or woman with no bonds, with none of the fixed or durable bonds that will allow the creation of his or her own sense of self to come to a rest.

3. QUESTIONS OF SEXUALITY

Anthropology has long made the non-heterosexual 'other' visible but it has always assumed that because heterosexuality constitutes the centre, heterosexual men and women do not have to create their sexuality, as such. As an analytical category, within anthropology, heterosexuality has therefore tended to be viewed as a consequence of gender and for this reason the study of gender has always been privileged as the discipline's primary object of study. In the 1970s, for example, Gayle Rubin (1975) argued that gender is the social and cultural construction of sex differences between men and women. Rubin showed how women, through their exchange in marriage between men, were forced to participate in a system of 'compulsory heterosexuality' which promoted unequal gender relations, through the imposition of a sexual division of labour which emphasised their roles in biological reproduction.

She used Levi-Strauss, amongst other theorists, to show that what lay at the basis of both gender and sexual oppression was kinship:

"Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relations of sexuality. Kinship systems rest upon marriage. They therefore transform "men" and "women", each an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with the other ... The suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is therefore a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women" (1975, p.179-180).

For feminist anthropologists (e.g. Reiter 1975, Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, Moore 1988) the idea that men and women were social and cultural constructions rather than natural creations was important in the sense that it meant that the oppression that women experienced could be changed. If as Rubin suggested non-heterosexuals were also part of the same system, equally it meant that the oppression that 'homosexuals' experienced could be changed too. Instead of therefore being forced to serve the interests of biological reproduction through kinship, it might be possible for individuals to perform their gender for themselves.

It was as a consequence of the gay liberationist movement, however, that in the 1970s and 1980s visible gay communities started to emerge within major cities from the public space that had once constituted the homosexual margins (Adam 1995, Seidman 1996). While unlike feminist theory the social constructivist approach to sexuality as developed by gay liberationist scholars (McIntosh 1968, Plummer 1975, 1981, 1992, D'Emilio 1983, Weeks 1977, 1981, 1985, 1986, 1991, 1998, 2000) only found its way into the very margins of anthropology as a discipline some anthropologists did use it (e.g. Newton 1979, Caplan 1987, Davis and Kennedy 1989, Blackwood 1986, Fry 1985, Carrier 1985, Vance 1990, Parker 1991) to demonstrate that conventional assumptions about the naturalness of heterosexuality and unnaturalness of homosexuality were only Western social and cultural constructions and not universal truths. Social constructivist scholars were also at the forefront of recognising that sexuality attaches to the experiences and perceptions that people have of 'things' that they engage with, as well as to individual's themselves through the way they define their own sexuality (Plummer 1984, Weeks 1985). As Jeffrey Weeks (1985) warned in a now classic work:

"Sexuality is as much about words, images, ritual and fantasy as it is about the body: the way we think about sex fashions the way we live it. We give a supreme importance to sex in our individual and social lives today because of a

history that has assigned a central significance to the sexual. It has not always been so; and need not always be so" (1985, p.3).

More recently the privileged position of the study of gender within anthropology has also been brought into question as gender is no longer regarded by many scholars as a category. Instead it is argued that if social and cultural determinants that seek to force men and women to participate in a system of 'compulsory heterosexuality' through kinship are resisted, then heterosexual gender itself, instead of being at the centre of a set of fixed relations, is freed so that it is able to become a matter of individual 'performance' (Butler 1990, 1993). In this way gender, once viewed as very much linked to sex as an analytical category, now finds itself in a new relationship with sexuality as queer theory argues that it is impossible to rethink sexuality through a primary focus on the study of gender. Gayle Rubin (1984) argues in a challenge to her own earlier work that gender and sexuality are in fact separate areas of study requiring separate theoretical frameworks. Theories of sexuality do not explain gender she argues and theories of gender do not explain sexuality. Although Rubin was more careful to note that gender and sexuality may still be linked together in specific historical and social and cultural contexts, on the whole, she changed her mind substantially from what she had previously argued by now contending that:

"It is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to more accurately reflect their separate social existence ... The criteria of relevance in feminist thought do not allow it to see or assess critical power relations in the area of sexuality. In the long run, feminism's critique of gender hierarchy must be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and the critique of sexual oppression should enrich feminism. But an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality must be developed" (Rubin 1984, p. 308-9).

In taking sexuality rather than gender as its starting point queer theory provides a more nuanced account than feminist theory of the changing nature of the relationship that people have to their sexuality. According to Eve Sedgwick (1991) acceptance of heterosexuality's 'minoritizing' view of non-heterosexual sexuality accepts that being gay is an issue of importance primarily for a minority rather than seeing being gay as an issue of importance in the lives of a wider cross-section of people. It was therefore a mistake, she argues, of feminist theory, to understand gender as the social and cultural construction of sex, when in actual fact, gender is not the issue but rather the way you perform your sexuality. As such, what a lot of the queer theory literature recognises is that being gay has been transformed from the status of an historically marginalised "other" into an object of desire (Sinfield, 1998, Simpson 1996, Hennessy 2000) so that it has increasingly become key to the production of heterosexuality.

The self-creating nature of the relationship that many people now have to their own sexuality has a long history of being underpinned by parallel changes in kinship structures as a number of scholars have made clear (Giddens 1992, Luhman 1986, Beck-Gernsheim 1998). Within anthropology Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp (1984) have long been arguing that the development of capitalism in the seventeenth century led to social and economic changes which made sexuality an 'individual' matter. According to this perspective the growth of large cities, separation of consumption from production and of leisure from labour as well as the dissolution of traditional kinship ties, permitted the possibility of people in Western cultures and societies experiencing their sexuality autonomously free of its reproductive function within kinship. Free from the needs of biological reproduction, heterosexual men and women have been able to develop what one scholar refers to as a "plastic sexuality" (Giddens 1991, p.2). Whatever the details of this historical transformation it is clear that within the United Kingdom today:

"The heterosexual couple, and particularly the married, co-resident heterosexual couple with children, no longer occupies the centre ground of British society, and cannot be taken for granted as the basic unit in society. By 1995-6 only 23% of all households in the UK comprised a married couple with dependent children (Social Trends, 1997)" (Roseneil 2000, p.7).

As people have increasingly come to experience their sense of self as an individual matter, sexuality has become central to ideas about authenticity. Ideas about authenticity have their origins in Western Romantic views of the self (Trilling 1972, Taylor 1991) which imply that a person can be more or less true to themselves. Historically authenticity has been particularly important to gay people who since the emergence of the gay liberation movement in the 1960s have been encouraged to be true to themselves by 'coming out' of the closet with their sexuality (Weeks, 1977. Plummer 1995). Because heterosexuality constitute the inside, the centre so to speak, the authenticity of heterosexuality by contrast was always thought to be guaranteed by heterosexual men's and women's roles in kinship. However, as the sexuality of heterosexual men and women has increasingly become free of its reproductive functions in kinship, heterosexuality has lost much of what was once thought to be its authentic content (Erickson 1995). In a world which emphasises diversity in which selves are no longer thought to be different at some fundamental level, in order for heterosexuality to continue to exist as a category, it has increasingly been turned into a life-project (Giddens 1991) that has to be self-created by the individual. Gay sexuality has been transformed from the status of an historically marginalised "other" into an object of heterosexual male and female desire. In this way engagement with the gay other has increasingly become key to the production of the heterosexual 'individual' imagined to contain a true sense of 'self'.

It is in the context of the development of a late capitalist market in which authenticity is at least thought to be capable of being achieved through a commoditisation of the self that an emphasis on sexuality's apparent lack of limits as a never ending performance, becomes powerful and persuasive. As such, there is a strong resistance to the idea of there being already in existence any sense of a shared "gay" or "straight" sexuality that could be used as the basis for defining "the self" let alone form the basis for a collective politics based on sexuality in any simple way (Simpson 1996, Sinfield 1998, Harris 1997, Roof 1997, Hennessy 2000). What this meant, in practice, within the context of the Village in Manchester was that in the absence of a collective understanding of what it means to be gay or to be straight, a number of questions were generated which concerned everyone. First, who is to be included and excluded within the so-called gay space of the village? Amongst those who owned or managed business within the area and those who used it for leisure a variety of representations of what it meant to be gay and to be straight co-existed alongside each other. One of the central issues which concerned many older generations of gay people, in particular, was the question of whether use of the Village was to be determined by how people themselves define their own sexuality or whether other negotiations of what it meant to be gay that straight men and women brought to the area were to be incorporated. For many older generations of gay people the possibility that as a gay space the Village was fragmenting was regarded as the most serious

challenge to the gay 'community' as a whole, threatening as it did the loss of an identity that many felt they had fought for. The basis on which the Village had been created had undoubtedly fragmented as new doubts started to be cast on what it actually meant to be gay in the Village in Manchester in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Many people sensed that a change was underway in terms of the way that the categories gay and straight were coming to be experienced and perceived but were uncertain about quite where all this was going to leave the Village. This was something that I constantly sensed when speaking to my co-conversationalists during fieldwork. What characterised these changes was a drive towards a particular form of 'individualism' of the kind that allowed for everyone to continuously create and recreate themselves as they see fit. As such, differences between groups of people that may once have been viewed as being fixed by nature (Strathern 1992) have come to be viewed by many people as open to 'individual' choice (Giddens, 1991, 1994, Strathern 1992, 2005, Salecl 2006). Such 'individualism' takes many forms, but it always involves a 'fantasisation' of 'the self' as one that refuses to accept the idea that society can set limits on self-aspiration owing to an endless drive on 'individual' consumer choice. As Renata Salecl (2006) says:

"In the Western World people are not only under the impression that there are endless possibilities to find fulfilment in life, but they are also encouraged to be

some kind of self-creators, i.e., they are supposedly free to choose what they want to be. In this highly individualized society, which allegedly gives priority to the individual's freedoms over submission to group causes, people, however, face an important anxiety provoking dilemma: 'Who am I for myself?'" (2006, p.1).

Salecl's theory is helpful here since, in practice, what it meant to many users of the Village to be gay and to be straight amounted to nothing more than 'individual' experience and perception which established issues of sexuality as more complex than what they had once been thought in the past in the sense that neither category appeared to have any fixed authentic meaning. While many older generations of gay people in particular debated whether men and women who self-identified their sexuality as 'straight' should be allowed to use the Village these kinds of changes were taken as an indication that people were free to choose to do as they wished by many younger gay men and women. Having questioned the purpose of having a separate gay space, many younger gay men and women therefore started to seek to create themselves from what the rest of Manchester had to offer.

Sean is a gay white man in his early twenties from Manchester where he works as a marketing executive for a large housing company. When he frequented the

Village he tended to use the trendier bars in the area such as Via Fossa, Spirit, Tribeca and 46 Canal Street, but as he himself explains:

> *My sexuality is defined only by my choice of sexual partner. I enjoy the straight scene and indeed most of my friends are straight. The Village serves a valuable purpose and I very much hope that it will continue to do so. However, life would not be nearly as interesting if I confined my social life purely to the gay scene. It is important to take what is best from Manchester, whether that is gay or straight makes absolutely no difference. I feel very lucky to be living in a city with the huge diversity of choice offered by Manchester.*

For Sean being gay is just one aspect of his identity and, as such, he does not want to be restricted only to the Village. As he explains, he likes the diversity of choice that he feels that Manchester offers which is why he also enjoys using the wider straight bar and club scene too. Neither does he feel that this is particularly problematic in any sense. Many gay people such as Liam, a gay white man in his mid twenties also felt the same way:

> *It's got to the point where I go out on the straight scene most of the time now because I choose the music over my sexuality and to be quite honest I might as well carry on because there is a higher ratio of straight bars compared with*

gay bars so there's much more diversity on the straight scene. When it comes to diversity the straight scene wins hands down as there are more people out there ready to try new things and not be confined by their sexuality. Nights do exist that are mixed in the Village such as Homoelectric which is really good but on the straight scene you've got clubs such as Sankey's Soap that has some of the most reputable DJs in the world and is becoming more and more mixed and is totally attitude and bitch free. Obviously, I don't recommend you taking your top off in there, it's not as well received as in the Village but I do think a bar and club scene that centres on music rather than sexuality is a good step in the right direction.

Like Sean, Liam also likes the straight bar and club scene in Manchester because of the diversity he perceives it to offer and more important than his sexuality when deciding where to hang out is the music played. As far he is concerned, the straight bars and clubs are less restricting than gay venues in the sense that they do not only centre on sexuality, hence his comment that "there are more people out there ready to try new things and not be confined by their sexuality".

Marcus is a gay white man in his mid twenties and is adamant that there is really very little need for the Village at all:

In the future, hopefully in my lifetime, we will have moved forward enough to be in a bar or club based on what people listen to/like, rather than who they want to have sex with. The problem with many gay people is that they want you to choose 'gay' before you choose somewhere that is what you might prefer musically. That's why the Village is becoming more and more like an early 80s ghetto. In the 90s Manto and Paradise raised the level, they said you don't have to listen to cheese or techno to be gay. You can dress up and look good and have straight friends that are not intimidated because of your sexuality. The Paradise era is over now, the decent gay and straight people understand there are better places to go rather than the ghetto Village. Now we have the tacky gay and straight people overrunning the Village, the bars that were once shunned as being embarrassing are now the busiest. The bars that are trying to make a difference are half empty. The usual cheesy pop, funky house and commercial R&B is being played to an absolute death in the Village. The straight bars and clubs are far more sophisticated with their music nowadays, employing talented DJs that play soul, underground R&B, funk, electro, deep house, breaks, acid jazz, hip hop to name but a few kinds of music. It is time us gays caught up. If we are supposed to be ahead with fashion, then why are we not with music too. The compilations don't get any better, and eventually lose their appeal. If all of the DJs in the Village entered a competition they'd all get a big fat zero for originality. All it takes is for one bar to open like Manto did in another part of town and start a new

liberalised scene and we will proudly announce that the Village is dead. Let's leave the Village for those who want to listen to dance versions of 1960s gay pop icons like Shirley Bassey, that's what I say.

Clearly Marcus feels that sexuality ought to be transcended by other factors, again such as the kind of music that a person likes, irrespective of whether they are gay or straight. In this respect he feels that the Village is rather passé and feels that it is debatable whether the area has any real future.

4. QUESTIONS OF COMMUNITY

Many of anthropology's earliest studies of gay and lesbian communities tend to emphasise the communities' role in constructing boundaries in relation to the heterosexual mainstream and pay little attention to the influence of the wider socio-cultural context in which these communities also exist. Later studies by Saran Green (1997) Kath Weston (1991) William Hawkeswood (1996) and Martin Manalansan (2003) do demonstrate however that such communities were generated from the social, economic and political conditions of the wider context in which they exist. As already discussed, similarly the Village in Manchester could not be understood outside of the city in which it existed.

Much of the theoretical literature on community formation argues that in order to 'imagine' that a community exists an unquestioned acceptance of a common homogenous identity is needed. Throughout this study I have argued that from the point of view of the Village in Manchester the collective basis on which a separate gay community had been created was continually being negotiated by individual straight users of the area which led to a questioning by many younger gay people of what the purpose of having a separate gay space was. Within anthropology Anthony Cohen's (1982, 1985) work on community membership is a great help in this respect. He argues that communities are best approached as 'communities of meaning'. In other words, '"community" plays a crucial symbolic role in generating people's sense of belonging. The reality of community, Cohen argues, lies in its members' perception of the vitality of its culture. According to Cohen groups of people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity (1985, p.118). Cohen argues that 'community' involves two related suggestions that the members of a group have something in common with each other and that whatever it is that they are held to have in common distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other possible groups (1985, p.12). Community, thus, implies both similarity and difference. It is a relational concept: 'the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities'. Cohen's argument is that boundaries may be marked on a map or by physical features. However, not all boundaries are so obvious: 'They may be thought of,

rather, as existing in the minds of the beholders' (1985, p. 12). As such they may be seen in very different ways, not only by people on either side, but also by people on the same side. This is the *symbolic* aspect of community boundary and is fundamental to gaining an understanding of how people experience and perceive communities. As David Lee and Howard Newby (1983, p.57) point out, the fact that people live close to one another does not necessarily mean that they have much to do with each other. It is the nature of the relationships between people and the social networks of which they are a part that is often seen as one of the more significant aspects of 'community'. When people are asked about what 'community' means to them, it is such networks that are most commonly cited. In a very influential anthropological study, Elizabeth Bott (1957) argued that the immediate social environment of urban families was best considered, 'not as the local area in which they live, but rather as the network of actual social relationships they maintain, regardless of whether these are confined to the local area or run beyond its boundaries' (1957, p.99). Many scholars argue that social networks are more attractive because they can be mapped and measured. An example of what analyzing networks can tell us is provided by Wenger's study of the support received by older people in North Wales (1984; 1989; 1995). She looked at the changing composition of networks using three criteria: the availability of close kin; the level of involvement of family, friends and neighbours; and the level of interaction with voluntary and community groups. As a result she identified five types of support network. The commonest

form was the second followed by the first – and tended to be the most 'robust' in terms of providing people with informal support.

To what extent then is it possible to speak of the Village as a gay community at all? What kind of gay community is it when there are no kinship ties, thin bonds of friendship and a variety of different representations of venues which users of the area variously identify as being associated with mainly 'gay', 'mixed' or 'straight' clienteles? Moreover, within the context of a strong emphasis on the 'individual' and individual experiences and perceptions of what it means to be gay and to be straight, what is the relationship of the 'individual' to the 'gay community'? Does the 'gay community' have any right to attempt to define the 'individual' and his or her sexuality? If the 'gay community' does not have the right to determine the sexuality of the men and women that it allows to use its space, then to what extent can one speak of a 'community' at all so much as just a collection of 'individual ' men and women who occasionally come together in their leisure time?

The continual questioning of the purpose of the Village by many younger gay men and women together with the range of understandings of what it meant to be gay that many straight users brought to the area continually highlighted the contested nature of having a separate gay space. In terms of relations within the Village I found that there were numerous examples of what Cohen would call

'symbolic competition' whereby many of the divisions within the Village reflected those outside it. Such divisions had the effect of blurring community boundaries rather than constructing them by asserting that the Village was in many respects no different to the city in which it existed. So, as Sarah Green (1997) also notes for the lesbian feminist community that she studied in London the Village far from being one community was either many or none simultaneously. Older generations of gay people who wished to maintain a separate gay space had little control over the use of the space by heterosexual men and women. As the testimonies of many of my co-conversationalist illustrate many younger gay men and women had a variety of interests which led to them starting to use straight bar and club scenes within the city and so they were not enclosed by community boundaries.

The problem with Cohen's analysis is that although he asserts that communities are symbolised and do not necessarily have any single visible features his theory still depends on the existence of a homogenous group centred on territory which form the basis for a community. Similarly the problem with Lee and Newby, Bott and Wenger's analysis is that they assume the existence of strong social networks as the basis for a form of community. None of these factors applied for the gay community in Manchester in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The community did not exist on the basis of a single understanding of gay sexuality, in fact the Village was continually

presenting different ways of thinking about things. The significance of the Village as a gay space for a form of gay community was not its ability to unite people. However, given that heterosexual use of the space had brought the purpose of maintaining a separate gay space into serious question many of those who owned or managed business in the Village did desperately try to find some kind of basis for uniting people with varying degrees of success as Colin, the promoter of a new club night in the Village called 'HomieSexual' explains:

> *At HomieSexual we have tried to start a night that is more about the music than sexuality. Yet there are still people who like our music but don't come because they are scared, impressionable and frightened of something different to the norm. I was speaking to a guy in Spirit on Tuesday night and he was dancing for about an hour to my music and I was shocked to hear that he loved RnB and hip-hop yet he hadn't even been to HomieSexual. He said his friends love Poptastic but that the Poptastic promoter had been going out of his way to say how rubbish HomieSexual is and that Cruz/Pop is better. The guy felt that he had no option but to go where his cheesy pop loving friends wanted to go as they felt some sort of false allegiance to Poptastic. Isn't that sad? And it's sad that one of the Village's most successful and oldest alternative pop nights is still slandering the Village's newest alternative music night. It's not what we expected. We have tried to offer diversity at*

HomieSexual. We are the first weekly club night to open in over four years and not close down. Yet we are still being attacked by the major club nights and some of the bars, even after a year. And we were messed about with by the Village Business Association. So why should anyone take risks and try an alternative night when they know they will just be hounded out of the Village?. The clubs and bars want the monopoly and they are scared of change. I have been working in the club scene in Manchester for nearly thirteen years and I'd say don't bother doing a night in the Village if you want to start up a night for everyone, irrespective of sexuality that's about the music.

Like many of the younger gay Village users above, Colin clearly feels that the music a venue plays should be the most important factor in deciding whether or not to attend a venue rather than how a person defines their sexuality. However, as he explains, his attempts to shift the emphasis of what a gay venue is by creating a club night that is about the music rather than how people define their sexuality, has not been entirely successful. Some kind of unifying basis for having a separate gay space had to be found. Given that the number of venues in the Village had increased dramatically over the years bar and club owners were increasingly under competition with each other to stay in business many gay people were after all starting to desert the area and thus create themselves from what other bar and club scenes in Manchester

had to offer. Towards the end of my fieldwork two of the bars owned by large brewery owned national chains closed, namely Bar 38 and the Slug and Lettuce, which two bar owners seized as an opportunity to try and take the area back to its original 'gay' roots. After a two year break Manto, the bar with long goldfish bowl windows which was to kick start changes in popular perceptions of what it meant to be gay and the regeneration of the Village, returned to its original spatial location at 46 Canal Street. During the Europride 2003 celebrations its owners distributed flyers to Village users which read 'People – Get Ready for the Second Coming, A Saviour is in the Midst'. Even more dramatic was the return shortly after my fieldwork of Paradise Factory, again to its original spatial location on Princess Street, just outside the Village, whose flyers simply read 'The Legend Returns'. However, despite the attempts of many bar and club owners to restore the area's original gay identity the reality was that times had changed and so had the Village. As John explains, a single, white gay man in his early thirties who used to frequent Manto and Paradise Factory the first time around:

I was shocked to see what has happened to Manto. As a regular of Manto and Paradise Factory many years ago I expected the buzz and the magic of then but what we received was a lot different. The atmosphere wasn't as good as it used to be in the past even though the venue looks quite good. The crowd was

not Manto as I remember it, it was a bit of a let down. I suppose it has had to move with the times but I'm sorry to say that it has gone down hill.

While many people tried to restore to some extent the gay liberationist interpretation of what it means to be 'gay' and to have a separate gay space like the Village in order to make the area socially, culturally and economically viable, newer experiences and perceptions of what it meant to be gay had already taken hold. The Village had become what Foucault (1986) might term a 'heterotopia', a counter-site in which all the aspects of the wider conditions of the city and British culture in which it existed were represented and contested. Nobody really seemed sure where it was all going to end up or what the future of the area was as a separate space for Manchester's gay community.

Conclusion

This study has shown how when frequenting the so-called gay space of the Village in Manchester men and women who self-identify their sexuality as 'straight' produce a multitude of understandings of what it means to them to be gay. More specifically, it has argued that through engagement with their own experiences and perceptions of gay sexuality while they are using the Village space, straight men and women who use the area attempt to enlarge the limits of their own sexuality. In this way they are able to create their own conceptions of themselves as heterosexual men and women. Not all gay people are, however, accepting of straight men and women using the space and a further aim of the study has been to explore how 'gay space' produces contested understandings of sexuality that reflect institutional, commercial and community interests. Within the gay community itself these interests are also cross-cut by differentiated power relations of gender, class and age. In what follows I outline what I see as my contribution to ethnographic knowledge. I also outline the substantial contributions that I have had to make to anthropological theory and methodology in order to be able to generate this ethnographic knowledge. I then suggest possibilities for future research.

1. CONTRIBUTION TO ETHNOGRAPHY

Within anthropology there have been numerous studies of non-heterosexual identities and communities. However, while anthropology has long made the non-heterosexual 'other' more visible it has always assumed that because heterosexuality occupies the so-called centre, it does not have to be created as such. What my own study has demonstrated is that through their use of the so-called gay space of the Village in Manchester heterosexual men and women are rethinking what it means to be straight from the perspective of being gay. In focusing on the creation of heterosexuality my work marks a new area of study for anthropology as a discipline.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that straight male and female users of the Village in Manchester attempt to create their own conceptions of themselves as straight men and women through their own sense of what being gay means for them as individuals. When I asked straight male and female users of the Village what it means to them to be gay, for example, they equated gay identity with 'things' such as bar and club culture, dress styles and music and dance forms as much as what they equated being gay with persons themselves. In this way, through a discourse in which gay sexuality has become linked to consumer choice men and women who self-identify their sexuality as 'straight' feel able to engage with their own 'individual'

sense of what being gay means for them. Through their own experiences and perceptions of what it means to be gay, and also the temporary absence of 'things' conventionally associated with being straight, heterosexual men and women attempt to enlarge the limits of their own sexuality. As I have shown, differentiated positions do exist within the Village, however, based on gender, class and age and these divisions between different groups of people express themselves spatially. Representations of the area are predominantly young gay male and lesbians and older gay men are marginal. Young gay men, largely because they are thought to be more style conscious, have more free time, fewer family commitments and more disposable income were positioned as objects of desire from the point of view of straight male and female users of the area. The Village is divided, for example, into 'old' and 'new' venues. Older bars in the area have become synonymous with older generations of gay people while newer ones take on the symbolism of being 'mixed' in the sense that they cater to both gay and straight clienteles or even mainly 'straight' clienteles. The newer venues tend to be associated with a commoditised form of gay sexuality while the older 'gay' venues are more strongly associated with imagery that suggests being gay is essentially about how a person defines their sexuality. Given then that there is no single understanding of what the Village as a whole represents, heterosexual men and women navigate their way through the area and thus find venues where as straight men and women, they best fit in. They therefore deliberately avoid

older style venues which they associate with older generations of gay people because these are the venues that they experience and perceive it necessary to be gay in order to frequent them. By frequenting the venues that they perceive to be 'mixed' or 'straight', heterosexual men and women are able to create their own conceptions of themselves as straight men and women.

As a space, the Village does not predominantly cater to older gay men, men and women in the process of coming out or lesbians. The Village was felt to be particularly undesirable by large numbers of lesbians who felt that representations of the space were predominantly gay male. Straight women engage with their own individual experiences and perceptions of gay sexuality as they are associated with young gay men but often make homophobic comments about lesbians and thus reinforce the invisibility of lesbian women through the imposition of their own heterosexuality. Straight men also engage with gay sexuality as it is associated with young gay male imagery but often subject lesbian women to their own sexual fantasies which lesbian women again find threatening. In this way the presence of straight men and women in the area created particular problems for lesbians and this is a research finding that resonates with Moran's and Skeggs' (2003) work on the Village. Many older gay men and men and women in the process of 'coming out' equally felt that the Village was not a very 'safe space' for them. Where older men frequented the Village they tended to mainly frequent the

older style gay venues while many lesbians frequented Vanilla, the area's only dedicated lesbian venue. Many of those who fell within these categories chose instead to use support groups run by the local Lesbian and Gay Foundation. However, while the Village is generally felt to be desirable for young gay men, many young gay men do complain that given that the area has increasingly come to centre on a commoditised form of gay sexuality, hence the reason why it is thought to have become popular with heterosexual men and women, it has become very difficult to meet people with whom to forge gay sexual relations. This may suggest that within the Village space being gay has to a greater extent come to be defined through 'things' perceived to be gay which heterosexual men and women can engage with as much as non-heterosexual men and women as they attempt to self-create their own sense of what it means to them to be straight.

2. CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY

Because anthropology has always assumed that heterosexual men and women do not have to create their sexuality, as an analytical category, heterosexuality has tended to be viewed as a consequence of gender. The study of gender rather than sexuality has therefore always privileged as anthropology's primary object of study. In taking sexuality rather than gender as its starting point what my own material demonstrates is that straight male and female users of the Village

in Manchester are questioning what it means to be straight from the perspective of being gay. As gay sexuality had come to be re-conceptualised by many as something that could attach as much to 'things' which straight as well as gay people could engage with in their attempts to constitute their own heterosexuality, previously taken for granted assumptions about the authenticity of both gay and straight sexuality were questioned. The original basis on which the Village was created as a separate gay space relied on the idea that what it meant to be gay and to be straight were at some fundamental level different. Heterosexual use of the Village, however, forced people to deal with ideas which focused on diversity rather than difference that involved a reanalysis of what it meant to be gay and to be straight. Whereas the concept of difference had always implied a stable difference between the two categories, the concept of diversity focuses more on the continual process through which categories such as 'gay' and 'straight', have to be self-created through performance by individuals. If the categories are not created performatively they will cease to exist. Instead of viewing the categories 'gay' and 'straight' as collective categories within the world on a theoretical level what my own material demonstrates is that instead gay and straight Village users held a range of interpretations of what both categories meant within themselves. To highlight the significance of the way in which through their own engagement with what they experience and perceive to be gay, straight male and female users of the Village and women attempt to choose how they wish to present themselves to

themselves as heterosexual men and women I have had to make a significant contribution to anthropological theorizations of the Western self.

Anthropology has usually drawn its theories of Western selves from philosophical traditions rather than from ethnographic work on the experience of being an individual in Western contexts (Moore 2007, p.28). Rather than viewing individuals as subsumed within and determined by culture and society my own study has shown how through engagement with their own 'individual' sense of what it means to them to be gay men and women who self-identify their sexuality as 'straight' have considerable capacity for creating heterosexuality. My material carefully recognises, however, that straight male and female users of the Village create their own conceptions of themselves as heterosexual men and women within the parameters of a discourse which emphasises 'individual' consumer choice that they themselves do not choose. Other studies of straight male and female use of gay space carried out outside of anthropology as a discipline (e.g. Mort 1995, Holt and Griffin 2003, Binnie and Skeggs 2004) have by contrast tended to argue that straight men and women are 'consuming' gay sexuality. In contrast to my own study, these studies have tended to overemphasise the social and cultural limitations placed upon straight men and women, thus denying them their agency as creative individuals. By contrast I have argued that there was no evidence to suggest that straight users of the Village in

Manchester were 'consuming' gay sexuality. Rather these straight users were enlarging the limits of their own sexuality by questioning what it means to be straight from the perspective of being gay.

While many straight men and women regarded engagement with this commoditised form of gay sexuality as personally liberating many gay people felt that their own understandings of what it meant to be gay, as they had been informed by the gay liberationist approach to sexuality, were fragmenting. I have therefore had to make a significant contribution to theorizations of community by questioning whether straight use of the Village space destabilizes rather than confirms the notion of a gay community. I have argued that the problem with existing theories of community is that they depend on the existence of a homogenous group centred on territory (e.g Cohen 1982, 1985). Or alternatively they assume the existence of strong social networks as the basis for a form of community (e.g. Lee and Newby 1983, Bott 1957, Wenger 1984, 1989, 1995). None of these factors applied for the gay community in Manchester in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The community did not exist on the basis of a single understanding of gay sexuality, in fact the Village was continually presenting different ways of thinking about things. The significance of the Village as a gay space for a form of gay community was not its ability to unite people. The community would therefore have to be either recognised as

no community at all or as a number of communities contained within what is geographically recognised as gay space.

3. CONTRIBUTION TO METHOD

Throughout this study it has been important to take account of the ability of 'individual' men and women to produce their own experiences and perceptions of sexuality. In order to be able to capture ethnographically ways in which individuals are shaping dominant social and cultural conceptions of sexuality as much as what they are being shaped by social and cultural determinants themselves I have relied heavily on highly reflexive research methods such as the life-history interview. A discourse analysis of my interview data then allowed me to capture through the language that people use multiple and contradictory understandings of what it means to people to be gay and to be straight. In line with a number of what were once referred to within anthropology as 'new' ethnographies (e.g Crapanzano 1985, Shostak 1981, Dwyer, 1982, Burgos-Debray 1984, Taussig 1986, Werbner 1991, Caplan 1997) I have also allowed my co-conversationalists a considerable amount of textual space than what classic anthropological studies perhaps generally do. I tended to use participant observation mainly to provide an analysis of spaces, places and events and also where I wished to focus on people as a group rather than on them as individuals.

On a practical level, however, I subscribe to the view that the field shapes the nature of the fieldwork and the fieldworker as much as vice-versa (Fumanti 2004). I found the life-history interview was more appropriate for working in the UK than what a traditional participant observation based approach would have been. Classic participant-observation studies took place in societies where understandings of home and work did not translate back onto Western models of private and public space very easily. Many were based in societies where social and economic activity took place in shared outdoor space, in warm climates that allowed for extended observation. The classic works also stemmed from embodied interaction in the field. In a Western anthropological field setting such as Britain by contrast research sites as they centre on people's home and work lives are more scattered, the weather is bad for ten months of the year and owing to the strong public/private divide that is characteristic of British society generally home lives in particular are often staunchly defended as 'private' space (Hockey 2003). While I have therefore used participant observation as a method I was able to do so in a more limited range of settings than what I would perhaps have been able to do so had I carried out fieldwork in a rural location in a non-Western culture and society (Rice and Louise-Berg 2004). My work on aspects of home and work lives, for example, tends to rely much more on interviews. Given that home lives are so private I would also strongly discourage anthropologists from putting their own personal safety at risk when carrying out fieldwork in the UK by going

on their own to their co-conversationalists houses. On a couple of occasions during the pilot stage of interviewing I did interview two men in my own home and I felt uncomfortable and unsafe which in itself was also a good enough reason I thought not to continue doing it. In many respects the interview can also be seen as an encounter which resembles many others in societies where relationships often have a 'disembodied' quality being conducted in bounded time slots such as by phone, text and email (Hockey 2003).

4. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

My own research has focused on straight male and female use of the Village in Manchester and the ways in which they engage with their own individual experiences and perceptions of what it means to them to be gay so that they can choose how they wish to be straight. As I have indicated in this research, however, many younger gay people are deciding that they also want to be free to choose how they wish to be gay and, as such, frequent straight bar and club scenes. Currently there is no published research which explores gay use of straight spaces, so to speak and I think this could be a productive research area. Throughout the study I have also shown that representations of the Village were predominantly young gay male and lesbians and older gay men were marginal. Differentiated positions were therefore evident based on

gender, class and age and these divisions between different groups of people expressed themselves spatially. The fact that I met very few ethnic minority men and women is in itself extremely interesting. Currently there is also very little published research on ethnic minority groups in relation to sexuality and again I think this could be an extremely productive research area. Research is also needed on the large numbers of gay and lesbian women who are not in relationships. We know that within the United Kingdom increasingly large numbers of heterosexual men and women are remaining single and although my own research findings suggest that large numbers of gay and lesbian men and women also lack relationships, this is an area where research is lacking.

Appendix A: Topics Covered in Life History Interviews

1.Sexuality, how interviewees came to define their sexuality and impact on their lives.

2.Use of, experiences and perceptions of the Village (i.e. which bars/clubs interviewees usually frequent/never frequents/time of day they socialise in these venues/how often and with whom.

3. Involvement with gay/lesbian discussion groups, marches and demonstrations etc.

4.Whether there is, to the minds of interviewees a 'community' to which they feel they belong and, if so, how the community is defined.

5.Current conflicts and debates within the Village with particular reference to what interviewees think about shared gay/straight use of the area.

6.Views on TV dramas set in the Village, whether these bear any relation to reality and perceived impact on the area.

7.Friendships and relationships

8.Hobbies and interests

9.Details of where interviewees live

10.Family background

11.Past and present occupations

12.Education

13.Age, nationality, amount of time spent in Manchester

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